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CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

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FOR

CHORUS, SOLI AND ORCHESTRA

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THE MUSIC BY

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Translated and Adapted by the REV. J. TROUTBECK, D. D. From the Original German Text of St. Luke II: I-21 and St. Matthew II: I-12

EDITED BY MAX SPICKER

VOCAL SCORE

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BACH'S CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

THE Festival of Christmas, as celebrated in the Reformed Church of North Germany, begins on the 25th of December and ends on the 6th of January. Such at least is old use, though many a professed Protestant and stout Teuton is now ignorant of the fact. It may come to pass, if the present course proceed of levelling times and tides, that Englishmen may forget the extent and limits of the Christmas season, bounded in front by the Nativity, and at the end by the Adoration of the Three Kings, which last some of us still commemorate by drawing for king and queen, and cutting for a ring into the twelfth-cake---Old Christmas Day, whose title is preserved, although the new style has changed the calendar. As yet, this passage has not arrived; and they who wish to conserve what is religious and what is homely of the merry season, together with those who aim at what is radically right once a year, which is all the year round, wish not for its coming. The German Festival particularly solemnizes the 25th, 26th, and 27th of December, New Year's Day, the Sunday after, and the Feast of the Epiphany, or the Wise Men's following of the star, or the dispersion of the light among the Gentiles.

The Christmas Oratorio was composed --so states an inscription in the handwriting of Bach's son on the original MS.--in 1734. This was five years after the production of the Matthew Passion, and was when the illustrious author was forty-nine years old. The six parts of the work are defined as being for performance respectively on the first, the second, and the third days of the Festival of Christmas, on New Year's Day or the Festival of the Circumcision; on the Sunday after this; and on the Festival of the Epiphany.

There is as much of likeness of manner in the music of the Passion and the Christmas Oratorio as of unlikeness of character. Hence, the latter will best be described by reference to the other-best, at least, to those whose knowledge of the former work enables them to apply the comparison. Like that, this was composed for performance in church, as portion or in extension of a service to celebrate one of the chief occasions in the Christian year. Unlike that, this pertains not specially to the one saddest day of a season of lamentation, but belongs to the outspread period of the Christmas festivities, and comprises music of less than halfan-hour's duration for each of six days' several performances, illustrating the events which are joyously commemorated throughout the Christian Catholic Church and in every Christian homestead. The Passion is the grief-song which pours forth the lamentation of Christendom; the Oratorio is the jubilation which streams from the open heart at the moment when neighbourly love is rifest among Christian men. The opposite sentiments of penitence and exultation are contrasted in the two compositions, one may indeed say, sublimely; but the rejoicing is so earnest, so devout, so truly from the heart's depth, in the one, that it borrows sometimes the tears of sadness from the other, and shows at the happiest under the aspect of woe.

As in the great music of the Matthew Passion, and in that (which is inferior alone to it) of St. John's version of the same story, in the Christmas Oratorio the Gos-

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pel narrative of the incidents the music glorifies is assigned to a tenor voice, and the part is designated the "Evangelist." Here, as in those other compositions, the narrative is broken by the entry of particular voices, choral or solo, to represent the persons, many or single, introduced in its course. As in those other cases, the narrative is interspersed with what have been called "reflective passages," but these are here in larger proportion to the whole than in those other works. The reflective passages are in two classes :--- First, the Chorals, or popular hymn-tunes which every child in North Germany learns with its mother-tongue; and, with these tunes, such verses of the poems, also known to everybody, as bear upon the situations wherein the Chorals occur; second, setting of original verses in the forms of Choruses, Airs, Recitatives, and concerted pieces for two or more solo singers.

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The part of the Evangelist has its main merit in its perfect declamation of the original words of the Lutheran version of Scripture. No translation could possibly substitute for these words at once the accepted English reading, the same number of syllables, words of the same or analogous meaning to identical notes, similar vowels to express the same feelings, and punctuation that admitted of breathing-points at the same periods of phrases. With diffident reluctance, be it avowed, there is one practical and effective objection to this portion of the music, which applies also to that of the Passion of both Evangelists, and which is infinitely to be regretted. This is the extremely wide compass of the voice-part, ranging often to a 12th or 13th in the course of one piece, together with the very free employment of the highest notes. The objection is less forcible in respect to the words to which the music was written, than to any words that can be adapted to the music; but the difficulty necessitates many a singer's modification of the notes to bring some of the passages within his pos-

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sible capability. The accompaniment of the Recitatives is for the organ, or, very far better, the harpsichord as represented by the modern pianoforte. Its assignment to a single player judiciously leaves the vocalist the utmost freedom with his recitation; and the pianoforte is the preferable instrument, as not clouding the enunciation by continuous sound. The passages for chorus and for single singers are most poetically composed, and are instrumented so as to give the greatest life to their effect.

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The harmonisation of the Chorals proves the author's infinite command of the powers of combination. Highly remarkable as it is for its musical beauty, it claims further admiration for its expressive fitness to the several situations in which these hymn-tunes occur. Some of the tunes are set plainly for the voices, with directions that certain instruments are to be in unison with each part, and the organ in unison with the whole. Supposing the tunes of these to be sung by the congregation, an instrument would be needed to make the harmony clear and to keep the voices in tune; but then, there would be a charm quite peculiar to the singers who had lifelong familiarity with the melodies, in finding their song supported by a substratum of harmony which gave vivid expression to the very notes they were uttering; and this charm would be extra to the pleasure everyone feels in singing a tune that he knows. It would be vain to substitute for the special effect, moral as much as musical, thus intended, the totally different process of singing at sight music before unknown, of which the voluntary executant would be as likely to take any other part as the principal melody, and from which a chaotic effect, rather than a multitudinous, would accrue. It was a fortunate device, when the Passion was produced under Mr. Barnby's direction, to substitute, rather, for the congregation's collective performance, a rendering of the Chorals, thus set, by the unaccompanied voices of the choir, with modifications of loudness and softness in

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accordance with the verbal expression, producing thus the effect most delightful to all listeners, and the best compensation for that pleasure which can never be enjoyed in a country where the melodies are as unknown as their harmonic treatment. Other of the Chorals are arranged with figured accompaniment for the orchestra, and these stand out in strong contrast to those more simply set.

The other class of reflective pieces has a particular interest in every instance, and this class will be presently examined, from number to number, with the premise only that the melodic beauty and the expressive power rise often to a height that no musician of any age or school has yet exceeded. The words for this section of the work are not taken from Holy Writ, or from the standard Hymn Book of the Lutheran Church, but were supplied by a writer of Bach's own time. It belongs to a very poor order of literature, and is conceived in a tone of personality, as regards the principal figure, that must be distasteful to a large number of earnest and thoughtful hearers. One may marvel that the great artist could spend his thoughts on such a view of the subject-one may perhaps regret; but, to understand him, one must regard the matter in the light in which he regarded it and wonder the while that he could write such music to thoughts of such an order.

The orchestration of Bach eminently distinguishes his music from that of other writers, as much of his own time as of ours. His broad writing for string-instruments has the grand character which always belongs to the contrapuntal style, and is common to him and to other composers; but his treatment of wind-instruments is distinctive and remarkable. Sometimes he accompanies a piece with one, or two, or a choir of these, in combination with the organ or the bowed basses, and the effect though changeless throughout, as when an organist holds to one choice of stops during an entire movement—is often most delicious and always characteristic. To this end, Bach employs sometimes two flutes-the flute was a novel invention in his day-for which his writing is for the most part lower than the average o^c what we now hear, and the sound of the flute is consequently soft and sweet and gentle. He uses three kinds of hautboys, constituting a complete choir, or what in Tudor times used to be styled a "consort" of this class of instrument. Two of these are obsolete, the "oboè d'amore" and the "oboè da caccia," and the other has been so improved in later days as to be far more extensively capable than of old. This modern hautboy amply represents as well the "oboè d'amore" as the ungualified "oboe" of Bach; and his second extinct instrument is efficiently replaced by our corno inglese, cor anglais, vox humana, or English horn. He writes also for trumpets, generally three, and always in D. The freedom wherewith he treats the upper notes of this instrument surpasses that of Handel, and the passages in which he uses these high notes are florid in the extreme. An interesting subject for enquiry is the ancient compass and capabilities of the trumpet, which extends, however, very far wide of present limits; it now boots only to speak of the prominence above all other instruments the trumpet must have held a century and a half ago, when bowed instruments were less doubled, and the rest of a band was less numerous than in our time. Nowadays, separated as they are by quality of tone as much as by loudness from the entire orchestra, the three trumpets of Bach are distinctly prominent whenever they are used; but, with their companions the drums, when he wrote, their sound must by comparison have been overpowering, and majestic in the extreme.

As has been said, the Christmas Oratorio was designed for performance on six several days, to each of which one of its six Parts is appropriate. Yet, there is no saying whether by accident or intention, the six Parts seem naturally to divide themselves into twice three, which is agreeably convenient for the performance of the oratorio as a whole, apart from ecclesiastical usage or requirement. Anticipating a practice which Mozart unexceptionally observed in common with many great musicians, but which others, in Bach's time and since, have disregarded, the complete work begins and ends in the same key. In the case before us that key is D. Moreover, each day's portion likewise begins and ends in the same key, and all these keys are, closely or remotely, related to what may be accepted as the normal key of D. So, the first part is in D, the second in G, and the third in D; after which, with wider digression, the fourth Part is in F; the fifth is in A, and the sixth returns once more to the original D. This provision indicates that the oratorio is to be considered as a whole, though each division is in some sort complete in itself; and it is from this point of view that its detailed description is now attempted.

Part I

The portion of the oratorio appropriated to the first day of the Festival of Christmas is highly jubilant in character-an irrepressible outburst, as it were, of the world's rejoicing. Especially must this be felt in the opening number, to which the clang of martial instruments, as much as the broad, exulting phrases for the voices, gives peculiarly an air of triumph. The majestic flourish of drums and trumpets that introduces this Chorus is eminently grand in its effect to us, and must have been far more so to those who first heard it, when these means of musical pomp were more rare in their use, and less familiar than now, therefore, to an audience. One may naturally wonder at the figure of speech which defines as "soldiers" the votaries of the religion of peace; yet wondering, one meets with this frequently in modern hymnology, and recoils perhaps from the strange misapplication. Here is, however, the music of the field without its weapons; no thought is prompted of bloodshed, vengeance, slaughter, hatred, the subjects that introduce the institution of soldiery and the objects that exercise it; the idea of joy is here to be expressed, and its expression is in the most sonorous and brilliant tones, just as to the eye it would be in the most vivid and glittering colours. The music pictures a happy multitude, clad in gayest holiday gear, with ribbons streaming and holly-branches waving, tokens of gladness at the event the season celebrates, and of belief in its everlasting influences. Moulded in the form of a first and second part, with repetition DaCapo, the piece has the highest contrast of character in the central section, where the noisier orchestration is for a while discontinued, and the imitative writing for the voices gives to them a different kind of interest.

This festal beginning is followed by a narrative Recitative, set to the first verses of the second chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, which tell of the imperial decree for the taxation, and the consequent journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem.

Nos. 3 and 4 are a movement of the description known in England as "accompanied Recitative," and an air, "Prepare thyself, Zion," for contralto. His treatment of it elsewhere, as much as here, seems to indicate a predilection of Bach for this voice, to which he assigns some of his sweetest, tenderest, most plaintive and most passionate strains. The present instance is full of gentleness and love and hope. It is one of the many proofs that the minor key is not, as common prejudice assumes, necessarily pathetic in its expression. The evasion of the perfect cadence for a moment, by a digression into the key of F, and thence into that of D minor, with the return to the main key of A minor for the deferred close, is a charming expansion of the beautiful and most manifest melody; and the second Part, beginning at the words "Thou must meet Him," is as tuneful as the first, of which it is a continuance as necessary as it is natural.

The Choral, No. 5, "How shall I fitly meet Him," is arranged for four voices. Its melody has been made familiar here by its masterly settings in the Matthew Passion, where it is sung to the words, "O Lord, Thy love's unbounded;" and it is four times repeated in the course of that oratorio with varied harmony, according to the expression of the five several verses of the hymn, and the situations in the history these are chosen to illustrate. A chief interest of the present piece lies in the totally different treatment of the tune from all of those five. The end, upon a half-close, is inconclusive in effect, and thence has a great power of suggestion as to what may be the result of man's meeting with the Saviour. This power of suggestion, of raising images in the mind besides that immediately presented, is one of the subtlest, and indeed one of the highest attributes of art, and it pertains more specially to music than to either of the other forms of poetry. Bach was a great master of it, and has rarely surpassed the delicacy of its present application.

No. 6 proceeds with the narration in the Gospel text, telling of the birth of Our Lord.

Upon this follows a Choral, "For us to earth He cometh poor," which is distinguished by special treatment. The tune, according to the freedom that composers of all times have allowed themselves in respect to these ancient themes, is written in 34

time, a variety that pleasantly relieves the more usual duple division of notes. The tune is assigned to sopranos only, with a figured counterpoint for the orchestra, and it is interspersed with interludes in recitative for a solo bass, which comment upon and enforce the text of the hymn. The sense of trust is well indicated by the appended words, "Kyrie eleison," set in monotone. There is extraordinary beauty, even for Bach, in the prelude or opening symphony, which is repeated at the close-a sign that the author, who most rarely gives a complete strain twice, himself felt its charm. The last four measures of this are notable no less for their loveliness than for the identity of their harmonic progression with that in one of the best and longest known in this country of the songs of Schubert, one in the series of "The Fair Maid of the Mill," in which the passage stands to iterations of the words, "Thine is my heart." The coincidence of the peculiar and delicious use of the chromatic supertonic harmony which this includes, in the two writers, is the more remarkable, because there is little likelihood that Schubert can have met with the work of his great predecessor.

No. 8 is a bass Air, extolling in apt musical phrases the greatness of our earth-born Lord, and honouring with fit contrast His lowliness who lies couched in a manger. The song is full of animation, and makes its stand as much by its individual merit as by its strong relief to the surrounding pieces.

The concluding number of this first division is a Choral, "Ah! dearest Jesus," set for four voices, with orchestral accompaniment, which brightens its effect without elaboration, and carries on the jubilant character of the opening chorus. The three trumpets and the drums of the first number are here employed again, and unity of character is thus maintained throughout the Part by the prevalence of one quality of tone, as much as by the sequence and coherence of ideas.

The Second Part begins with a symphony picturing the shepherds on their nightwatch. A Pastoral Symphony this is truly, in respect of its quiet, gentle, passionless character, and it follows so far conventional notions of shepherd-life, that it is in $\frac{12}{8}$ time, with four smoothly-flowing triplets in a measure. It differs, however, from the instrumental movements by Corelli and Handel, that illustrate the same incident, so far as may be possible for anything, having the same subject and means of expression, to differ. It makes no allusion to the traditional Pifferari tune, which is prominent in both these pieces; but it is quite as melodious, quite as sweet, and quite as true to the purpose. Silvered by the silent moonlight, earth seems to sleep in the lap of peace, in token of the universal rest this night should have initiated.

No. 11—the numbers run continuously through the whole work—resumes the Gospel narrative with the words "And there were shepherds," in the wonted Recitative for tenor.

Reflective upon this is the Choral, "Break forth, O beautcous, heavenly light," which is harmonised, as are all the selections from Lutheran hymnody, with exquisite fitness to the situation whereon it is brought to bear.

St. Luke's text is resumed in No. 13, the words of the Angel, "Be not afraid," etc., being distinguished from those of the narration, which stand in the third person, by being assigned to another voice, a soprano, after the manner of all the personal passages of the two Passions by Bach, and in very far earlier precedent. The solo of the Angel is exceptionally accompanied by the orchestra, as are all those of Jesus in the Matthew Passion, seemingly to distinguish the divine personality from the narrator, and from all the human speakers, with more or less the same purpose that induced the old masters of pictorial art to invest the head of the Saviour with a glory.

An accompanied Recitative for bass, "What God to Abraham revealed," like all the similar pieces, is quite apart in character from the narration, as much in the vocal phraseology as in the manner and fullness of the accompaniment. It introduces the tenor air "Haste ye! shepherds," a grateful, lively, but dignified exhortation, which applies as much to all men in all ages as to the watching pastors of the flocks of Bethlehem—an exhortation to meet the Saviour with cheerful, hopeful and loving hearts.

"And this shall be a sign" (No. 16) pursues the narrative as before, and makes way for the Choral "Within yon gloomy manger."

The Recitative for bass, most delicately accompanied by wind-instruments, compares the shepherds, who are now to welcome the new-born babe, with that revered shepherd of old to whom was made the first revelation of His advent. Here follows a piece of such exquisite beauty as has never been surpassed, if ever equalled even by the same master-hand. Bach's fondness for the contralto voice has not been evinced more appropriately than in his choice of its tenderest of tones for the embodiment of his loveliest of ideas in the number before us. It is a Cradle-Song addressed to the sleeping Christ, that seems in its soothing sweetness to sing away all possibility of trouble, and to promise endless repose. The charm of the music is a subject to which no words can do justice. The sustained notes of the voice through the streaming melody of the instruments are lulling in their effect, and the motherly tenderness breathed through the whole must win its way to every sympathetic heart. This exquisite song, curious as the fact may seem, is portion of a dramatic cantata called "The Choice of Hercules," written by Bach in honour of the Prince of Saxony, and performed in 1733, the year prior to the composition of the oratorio in which it is pertinently incorporated.

A Recitative tells of the appearance of the heavenly host around the Angel, and the song of this multitude is then presented in a Chorus (No. 21), not in the concise form of the Turbæ of ancient Latin use, which is but little extended in the exclamations of the populace that intersperse the two Passions, but constituting a largely developed and highly elaborated movement. The many-voiced choir is picturesquely figured in the imitative entries of the several parts. The long sustension of the successive bass notes, B, E, and A, with the hush of all the orchestra, successfully paints the idea of "Peace on earth;" and the recurrence of the pianissimo at the end of the piece, after a renewal of the fugal character that precedes it, cannot fail of its impression.

The concluding numbers are an invitation, in accompanied Recitative for bass, to unite with the angelic singers, and a Choral celebrating the Redeemer's praise; the florid orchestration that accompanies this last being a reminiscence of the symphony that opens the Part, a renewal of the pastoral character that initiates this division of the work. It is a great means in a musician's hands, this, of unifying several pieces in an outspread work, by recurring to one in a later situation, whose purpose may be illustrated by the allusion; and it is interesting to note that this device, often supposed to be peculiar to modern art, was happily applied by the master who anticipated everything which after-writers have been thought to originate.

Part III

The pompous instrumentation of the music for the first day of the Festival is resumed in that for the third; and, with it, the jubilant character, as contrasted by the greater tranquillity that marks the Second Part. The opening chorus is truly tuneful, and by no means wanting in the harmonic interest that always invests the music of the master; its rhythm is most obvious, and its impression accordingly easy.

In Nos. 25 and 26 is related how, on the Angel's departure, the shepherds agreed to go to Bethlehem, they being personified in a short animated Chorus to the words of their interlocution. An accompanied Recitative for bass leads to the Choral "The Lord hath all these wonders," to which the florid accompaniment of the flute gives special interest. In this again the appended words "Kyrie eleison" (Lord, have mercy), with the close upon the dominant chord to which they are set, give a distinctive effect to the termination.

The Duet for soprano and bass (No. 29) is rich in the intertanglement of the two voice-parts, which give each additional interest to the other. This piece is eminently fit for private performance, and may be turned to such account by any singers who can feel its charm.

The words of the Evangelist are resumed in a tenor Recitative, telling how all men marvelled at the shepherds' story, but Mary pondered in her heart the wonders which had befallen her. The reflective passage upon this text, an air for contralto, "Keep, oh, my heart," is another example of the composer's sympathetic treatment of the female low voice; and its combination here with a solo violin, seems to draw further tenderness from its tones than that wherewith it is naturally endowed. Like

the piece for the same voice and instrument in the Matthew Passion, "O Lord, have mercy," this air is in B minor, and it proves as much the versatility of a key as of the human and mecharical means of sound, that the two are totally unlike in character and expression. The sentiment of maternal pride, most gentle in its exultation, is continued in the ensuing accompanied Recitative for the same voice; and the scene culminates in the Choral "Thee with tender care I'll cherish," which is simply set for the voices.

In the Recitative (No. 34), the tenor voice, which permanently represents the Evangelist, tells of the return of the shepherds; and the final Choral transfers to us, who participate in the performance of the work, their song of rejoicing. This piece, however, is not strictly final, for the opening Chorus of the present Part is now to be repeated, so that the music for the third day closes as it begins; and closes-also in respect to the orchestral colouring, as that for the entire Festival commences-with the joyous sounds of drums and trumpets. The three Parts thus concluded complete in some sort the first of two larger divisions of the work. They refer, as has been shown. to the immediate Feast of Christmas; whereas the three following celebrate the dispersed later festivities of the season; and they are technically connected by the consecution of keys, the 1st and 3d beginning and ending in D, and the 2nd—as if it were an episode between the other two-opening and closing in G.

Part IV

The Fourth Part especially represents the feeling of devotion. The music is distinguished from all that has gone before by being set in the key of F (so at least it begins and ends), the intervening pieces being, as in the previous Parts, in keys closely related to the principal; whereas, that of the foregoing divisions of the oratorio is all in sharp keys. Even upon persons with an uneducated musical sense, this broad change of tonality would give a new character to the music that was to follow, were the several Parts performed in direct succession on the same occasion; but it could little influence the effect, even upon thoroughly trained and most sensitive musicians, if heard, as was designed, on New Year's Day, four days after the first three Parts, when all impression of the key and its colouring must have passed out of the minds of the hearers. Nowadays, and in England particularly, the work is likelier to be given entire in one performance, than to be spread over the period from Christmas to Twelfth Day, and hence we may enjoy an effect from the tonal arrangement, which the audience for whom the oratorio was originally planned must have missed. We now come to the Festival of the Circumcision, wherein is embodied the idea of worship as cheerful as it is devout. The first Chorus calls upon men to fall down and adore the Saviour of our race. Its design is progressive, not having the repetition Da Capo which was common, though certainly not necessary, in compositions of the time, and whose absence distinctly lightens the effect of the whole. This whole is remarkably melodious, and it has a feature so prominent that the movement is obviously characterised thereby, namely, a long-sustained note in one or other of the parts-first F for the basses, then C for the sopranos, then F for the altos, and C at last for the tenorsthrough the moving harmonies of the other voices. This gives delightful repose to the general effect, and shows the tranquillity of spirit that is associated with the act of reverence.

In No. 37, the Evangelist tells of Our Lord's Circumcision; and of his receiving, according to the Angel's prediction, the name of Jesus, or Saviour. Following this is a piece of somewhat curious structure; it is an Arioso, so called, for soprano, or a continuance of melodious phrases that, while quite rhythmical, constitute not a complete melody. This Arioso is preceded, accompanied, and followed by passages for bass in recitative. "Emmanuel, beloved name," begins the latter, declaring how, in death as in life, this name and our faith in it are our unfailing safeguard; while the soprano sings "Jesus, Thou that for me livest," revealing, as it were, an under-current of thought to the uttered contemplations. Bach has employed various devices for the presentation of a twofold thought. of which none better realises the idea than the present; notice, for example, several numbers for solo voices, with chorus, in the Matthew Passion, and the opening piece of that great work, where the means employed are the counterpoint and interludes, of the instruments and eight vocal parts, to the Choral, which is sung by a ninth set of voices wholly independent of the others. The pleasure he must have taken in such double expression is peculiar to a mind so complicated as his own; if, in any but his own, the power of entertaining simultaneously a substance and its shadow can have been so highly developed. We, however, who could not have conceived this intricate design, may observe and take full delight in its happy realisation.

The soprano Air (No. 39) is a charming thought, most charmingly set forth. Addressing the Saviour, it asks again and again questions ending, one with "Nay," another with "Yea," and an echoing voice, as if that of the mighty Healer of sorrows, repeats from a distance the final word, answering thus the enquiry with comforting assurance; and then this voice is reëchoed by an instrument, confirming with delicate tenderness the peace-giving power of the first answer. The hautboy, with the organ, accompanies the principal voice, and has the second response to the question, and the effect of the whole is one of the most ethereal that can be imagined. This is a far simpler application of the twofold purpose than any of those to which allusion has just been made, and the purpose is accordingly more transparent here and more easily appreciable. If fortunate in its performance, this piece must command the sympathy of an audience, and fix itself on the recollection.

No. 40 is another specimen of the ingenious weaving of Recitative for the bass voice into the woof of an Arioso for the soprano, and with the same successful purpose of showing the course of an inward thought which underlies an uttered expression.

We have, then, a singularly grand Air for tenor, "Tis Thee I would be praising," which is so elaborately accompanied that, with smallest modification, it might be converted into a Chorus of many parts. The florid subject for the solo voice is answered by the instruments with such closeness and variety and constancy, that it may almost be said to form the basis of a fugue, which is formally worked in the orchestra. It is of the grandest character, and grandly delivered by a grand voice will give noble expression to the sentiment.

The last piece in this Part is a Choral, with florid interludes wrought upon a figure that is independent of the vocal melody, and it is accompanied with a constantly moving bass. Moreover, it is set in triple time. It is astonishing what variety the master makes out of these old tunes, and how he always freshens their interest. In the present Part, there is no instance of a hymn-tune being accompanied note against note, and the absence of this simple form makes one recollect with pleasure its excellent effect in other places.

The Fifth Part of the work is appropriated to the Sunday after New Year's Day. Quitting the Gospel of St. Luke, the narrative portion turns to the second chapter of St. Matthew, wherein is recounted the coming of the Wise Men to Herod, and their consulting the Hebrew authorities as to the predicted place of the Nativity. The opening number is a Chorus, which strangely reminds one of the manner of Handel-a coincidence that is chiefly worthy of remark as proving that, while the idiom of the age necessitated certain identities in the style of all contemporaneous musicians, the two greatest of them all had each such distinctive characteristic features that one instantly perceives the slightest leaning of either to the ways of the other. The materials of this piece are, firstly, a kind of double subject, in which the soprano and bass voices begin with one melodic motion, and are presently joined by the alto and tenor with another, the vocal distribution being reversed in the repetitions of the theme, and a parallel division of the wind and bowed instruments being employed in the orchestral interludes; and, secondly, a fugal point, whose answer is not strict nor its development extensive. The form is an alternative First and Second Parts, the latter of which, as is frequently the case in movements so framed, consists of some further working of the ideas presented in the First Part. "Glory to God Almighty" is the opening of the text, whence may be gathered the general expression of the music; but glorification is rendered in the breadth of the phrases rather than in the noise or even fullness of the instrumentation; and this Chorus is an instance, of which the vocal music of Bach has many, of how great is the power of contrapuntal writing as compared with that in which the voices sing for the most part together in notes of equal length. The acoustical reason for this would be difficult to surmise, seeing that it is the reverse of what might be expected by one without experience; but facts supersede argument, and cruelly crush philosophy whenever philosophy has not reached the bottom of its subject.

The choruses of Handel, and of every other writer for voices, prove this as much as do those of our author. The slow eightpart introductory movements in "Israel in Egypt," like the Chorals interspersed throughout the works of Bach, are grandly massive, it is true; but the real powerto repeat the definition that appears best to express the present meaning-of the choir, the fullness of tone that travels into all corners of a spacious building, the genuine majesty of sound, springs from that class of writing wherein every part has a melody independent of the others, with shorter or longer notes than they, and with a rhythm as different from theirs as is its accentuation. To make the voices of a choir sound many, let them sing a fugue or piece in which the parts are figuratively contrived in relation to each other; this is an axiom upon which every young writer may rest his total trust.

The Evangelist, represented by the tenor, resumes the story. Breaking in upon this, after the manner in which the multitudinous pieces intersperse the narrative in other works framed on the same model as the present, is a Chorus of the Wise Men, enquiring where the new-born King may be found; and, although the words stand not in the Scriptures, the same terse, dramatic manner vivifies them in the setting as those elsewhere given on Gospel authority, and the amplification of the text is justified by the effect. Interrupting the many-voiced question, an alto Recitative exclaims, "Seek Him within my breast," and tells of the peace which is His harbinger. The scene

so it may be defined—is closed by a Choral, plainly harmonised as to counterpoint, but somewhat curiously as to the choice of chords and the keys through which it ranges.

An Air for bass (No. 47), in the key of F sharp minor, is a prayer for light to the heart; to which the minor form of the key gives earnestness of expression, but not melancholy. The ingenuity is conspicuous wherewith the bookwright has seized every suggestion of the sacred text upon which to found a comment that appropriates the situation to modern Christians, whose creed is transplanted to our northern regions from the sunny slopes of Palestine; and the genius is wonderful that has breathed a living soul into the half-metaphors, half-dogmas, of the German libretto, and thus given them a voice that speaks to the very heart of men.

Then the Evangelist resumes, telling how Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled. As different in the depth of their expression, as in the manner of their accompaniment, are all the reflective pieces of Recitative from those which relate the circumstances of the story. This is made obvious in the interrogatory for the alto, as to why we should be troubled at the thought that the Lord is nigh who brings us comfort and hope, as opposed to the matter that surrounds this episode. The narrative is continued to the effect that Herod consulted the Scribes and Pharisees, who quoted ancient prophecy to assure him that Bethlehem should be the birthplace of the Messiah; and these words of the learned are set to a kind of melody, quite rhythmical, but of the formal, rigid cast that would fit it to stand, from generation to generation, among foresayings that may not be disputed.

It is rare in Bach to meet with a piece for three solo voices, but here (No. 51) is a specimen. In this Terzetto the soprano begins with an expressive melody, "Ah! when shall we see salvation?" with which in turn the tenor also enters, when it is involved in the counterpoint of the other voice. These two change and interchange the principal part and the counterpoint throughout the composition. Anon, the contralto introduces a distinctly different theme, "Peace, for surely this is He," and this part maintains its independence of the other two, the word "Peace" being often brought as response to their complaining "Ah!" the interest of each subject never being allowed to fail. To add to the complication of the three vocal parts, there is an obbligato accompaniment for a solo violin, spread over a wide extent of compass, which enriches but not confuses them.

The contralto Recitative (No. 52) declares, still pursuing the thought just enunciated, that the heart of man is the Redeemer's throne; and the final Choral (No. 53) meekly protests the unworthiness of the seat for Him who should rule therein. This division closes as it begins, in the key of A, contrasted strongly in tonality to the last preceding part, but having, like that, affinity to the master-key, D, which controls the entire oratorio. Part V contains many incidents for admiration; but, popularly speaking, it is perhaps the least attractive portion of the work.

Part VI

The festive character of the music for the first and third day is renewed in that for the Festival of the Epiphany, the sixth and last division of the oratorio. It is not only that we have the glittering, rejoiceful tone of the trumpets and drums in the opening and closing numbers, but the jubilant spirit of which they are the voice now again shines forth in fullest brightness. The first Chorus (No. 54) triumphantly, with faith as firm in His will as in His power, exhorts the Lord to defend us against the assaults of our foes. Amid all the grandeur of this movement, two incidents, each several times repeated, particularly strike the attention with their extreme modernness of character and their extreme beauty of effect. The bass progression with the harmony indicated by the figures

is one that may be found, indeed, in many a composition of yesterday; but, not to speak of its rare, or perhaps unique, employment a century and a half ago, its equally unexpected and brilliant effect in this situation is not excelled by any employment of the same course of chords in the latest writings, and its climax to a full close in the key of A major is most noble. Again, the bass progression

being shown by the context to be in the key of D major, is one of the gorgeous anticipations of the extremest use of chromatic harmony in the present day, which prove those mighty giants of the past to have stood, as it were in the clouds, overlooking all time to come, and proving that, whatever of good effect has since been produced, was foreseen, and indeed foreshadowed by them. These giants were Purcell, Handel, and Bach, for whom there are no words of sufficing reverence.

The Evangelist proceeds, relating how Herod sent for the Sages; his words of enquiry of them, and his declaration that he will follow them and worship, being allotted, as in all like cases, to another voice. The Recitative for soprano, assuming the purpose of the king to be feigned, addresses

him as the type of evil; and the ensuing Air, "Naught against the power He wieldeth," symbolises man's helplessness against ill, if he be unassisted by heavenly support.

Nos. 58 and 60 pursue the Gospel story as to how the Wise Men made their offerings and, in obedience to a preternatural warning, departed without returning to the Jewish King. They are divided by the Choral, "Beside Thy cradle," which brings the act of worship and sacrifice home to us, who are reminded of the first oblations to the infant Deity. The tenor for a second time leaves the part of the Evangelist, and, in an accompanied Recitative, shows the unconcern we should feel at the departure of external riches, so long as we retain the priceless treasure of divine love. This leads to one of those pieces which are prominent amid the constant beauty of the whole, the Air in B minor for the same voice, "Ye foes of man," which, with deep feeling and entire sincerity, defies all might against one who is guarded by the shield of faith. A curious point of harmony marks the chief theme of this piece, the theme which begins it and is many times repeated in its course. There is a succession of 6ths

which naturally enough fits over a B bass; but then it is given again, over G in the bass, in spite of the sharp F, when it is followed by D bass, bearing a first inversion, and the effect is as good as the progression is rare. In the beginning of Mendelssohn's Octet for string-instruments is a like retention of the dominant note over a chord of the submediant, with a like leap from the bass note; and it is interesting to trace this prominently beautiful thought to its possible prototype.

No. 63 is somewhat like in structure to the last piece but one in the Matthew Passion. It is a Recitative, so styled, for the four solo voices; which, entering successively with the same phrase, are combined in constantly fuller and fuller harmony. The music does some sort of violence to its definition, seeing that it is not possible, or, indeed, desirable of performance otherwise than in measured time; yet it justifies the title, Recitative, insomuch as it is not rhythmical, and declaims its four brief sentences, rather than sings them to a distinct melody. It is an introduction to the Choral that closes the entire work, which has the same melody as No. 5 in this oratorio-the melody that has now become familiar to English ears, from its use several times in the Matthew Passion. The tune is here employed as a song of triumph, to which end it is embroidered with interludes and counterpoint of exulting brightness, including the flourish of trumpets and drums, and passages that best bring out the tone of all the other instruments; and it peals from amid this din of joy, as would thunder peal through the turmoil of the elements, were thunder the voice of gladness instead of destruction. To compare its settings, as "Now, vengeance," with that as "How shall I fitly," is eminently interesting; but to extend the comparison to the five settings in that other work of Bach, and especially to compare the present grand outburst of joy with the last of those five, "If I should e'er forsake Thee," that most pathetic of all musical expressions of grief, displays perhaps the versatility of the tune, and certainly the mighty power of the master.

The Christmas Oratorio is of a nature. speaking of the music, to take quicker and firmer hold of popular attention than could the Passion, since it not only contains the joyous element which is entirely absent from the other, but also possesses far greater variety and contrast. A portion of it was publicly performed in 1868 at a concert of the Royal Academy of Music, under the direction of Mr. W. G. Cusins, and a portion also at one of the Concerts of Ancient and Modern Music at another period, under Herr Schachner's direction. (Parts I and II were sung at Boston, Mass., by the Handel and Haydn Society, in 1877.) It was first offered to a London audience in a shape approaching completeness, at a Concert of Mr. Barnby's Choir, which he conducted, on the 15th of December, 1873, when its reception warranted the above surmise, and gave fair ground to expect that it may become here a great and permanent favourite. The world must be the better and the wiser for familiarity with this noble music, and the double opportunity to hear it and to read it is most propitious to a true and wide knowledge of its beauty.

G. A. MACFARREN.

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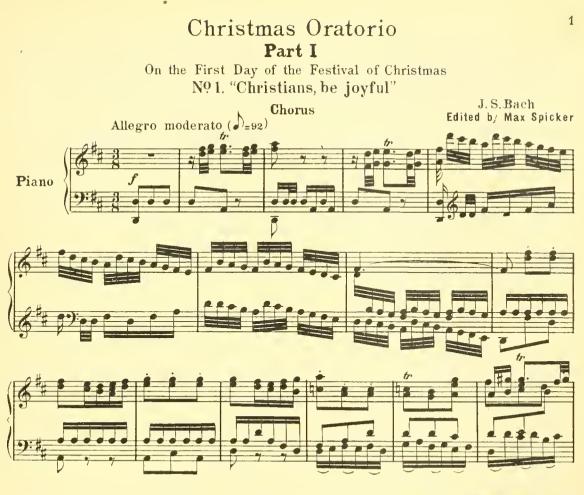
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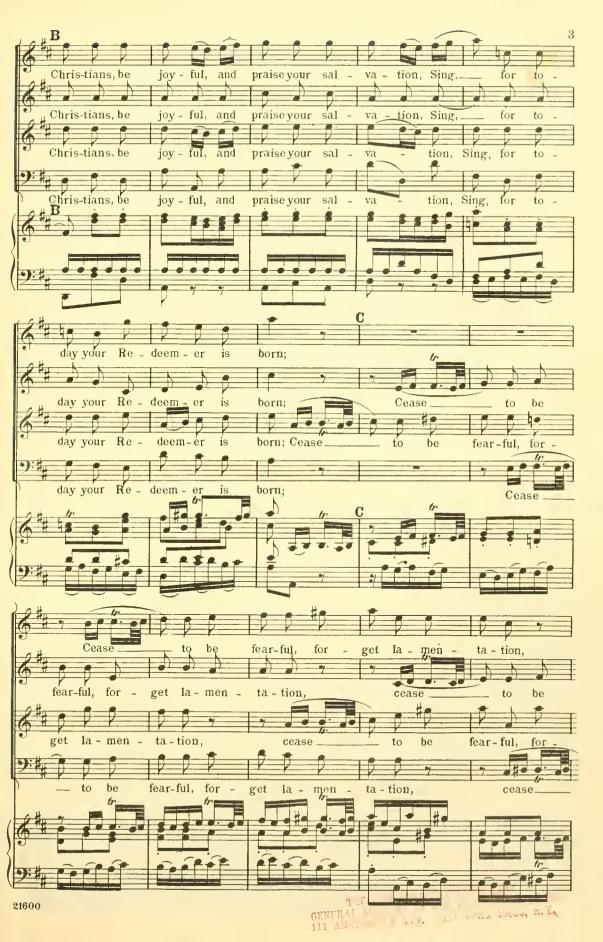


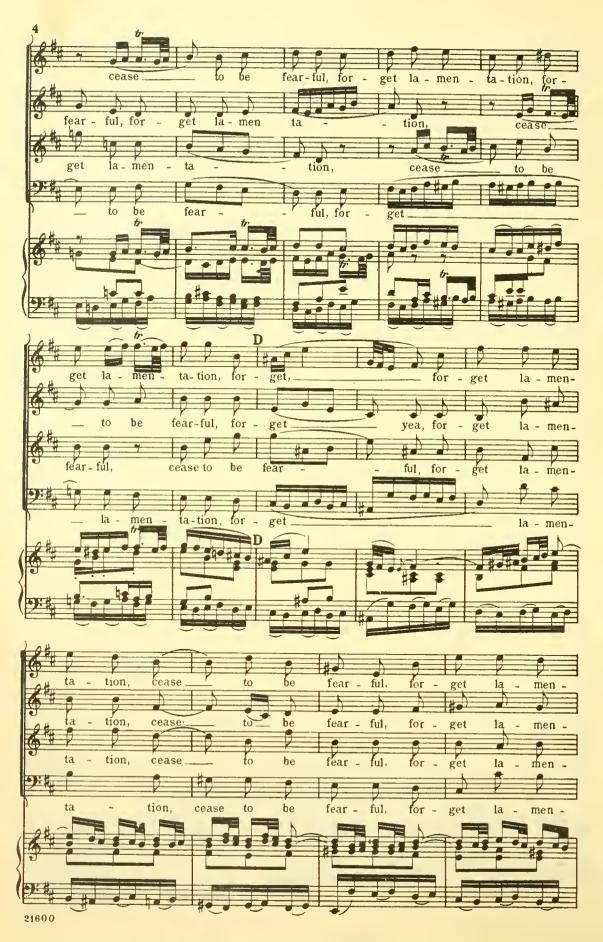


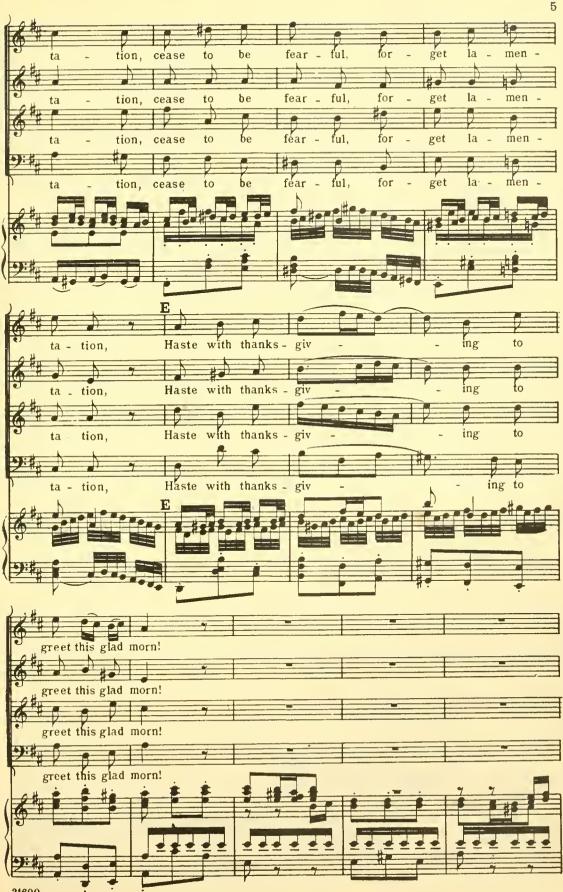


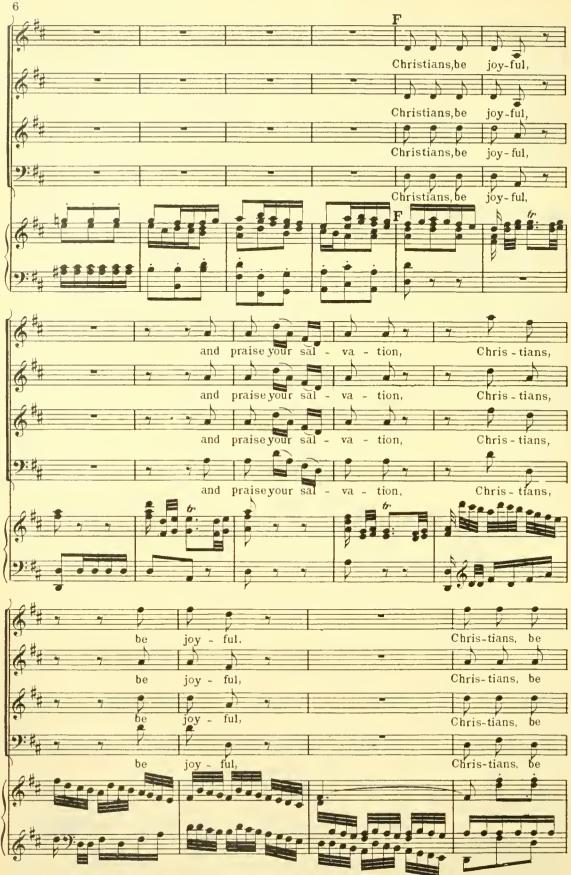




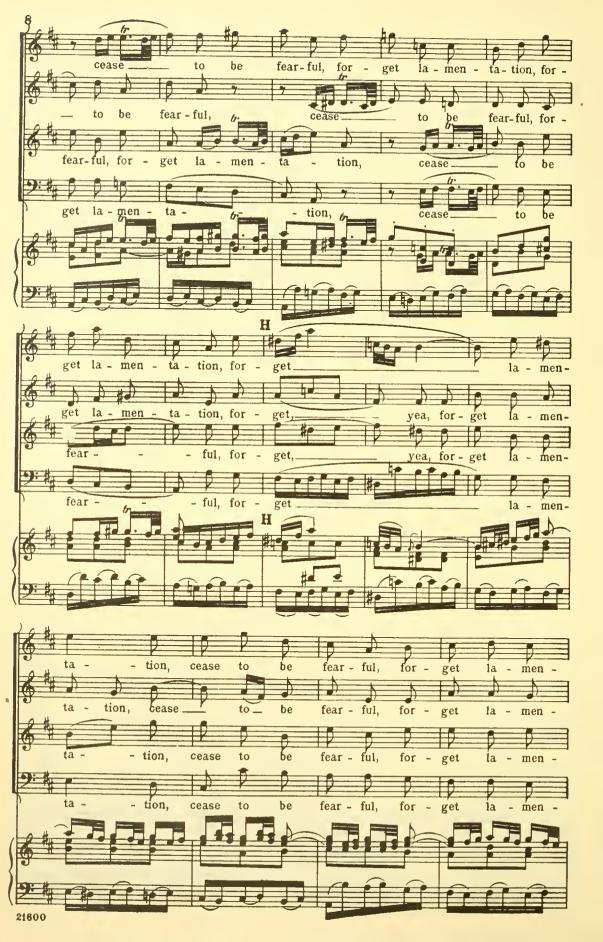




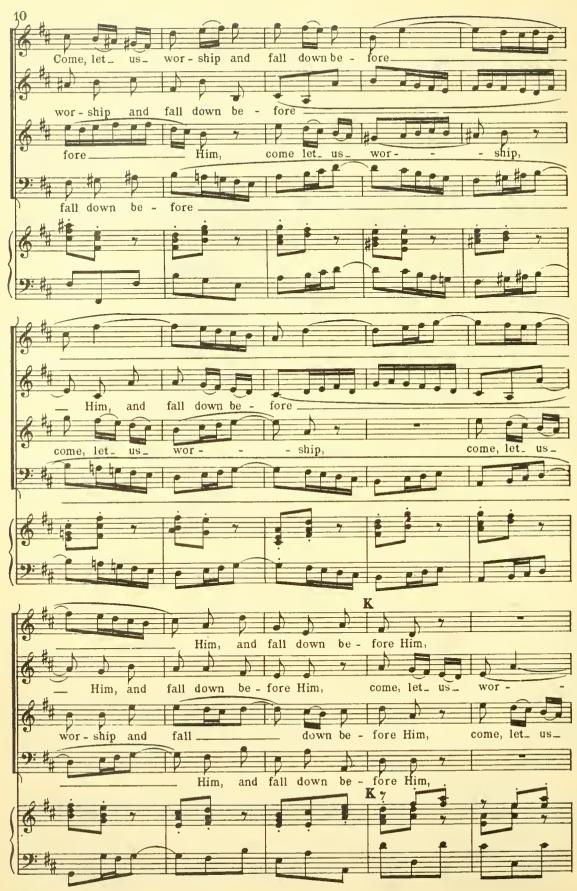


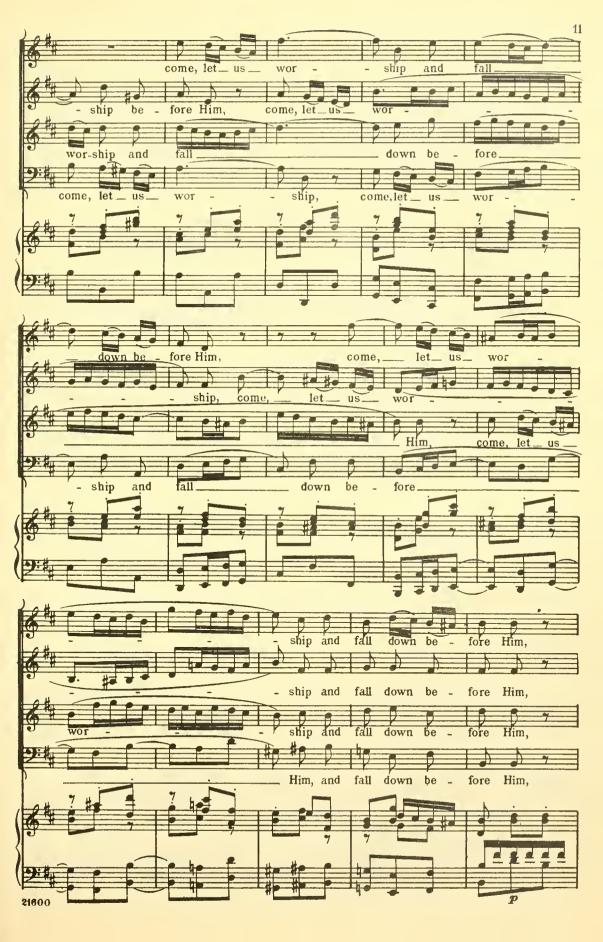








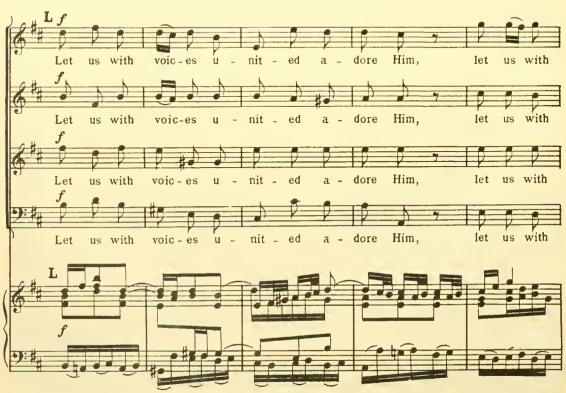






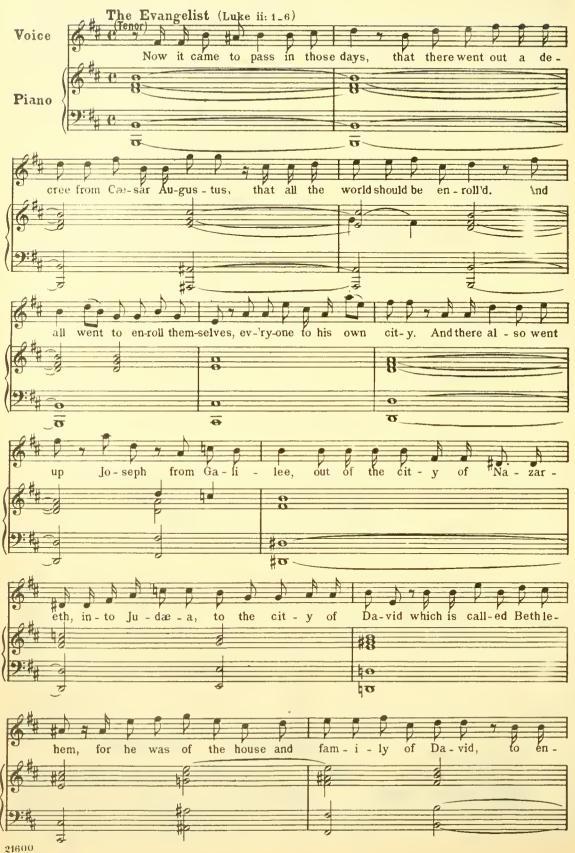




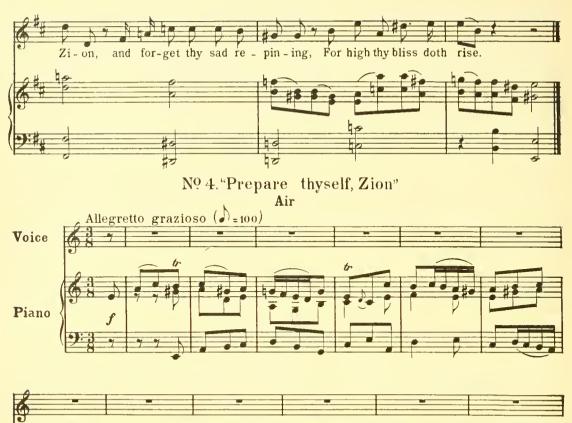




Nº 2. "Now it came to pass in those days" Recit.

















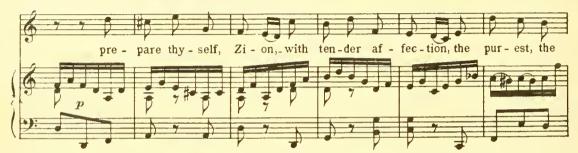




























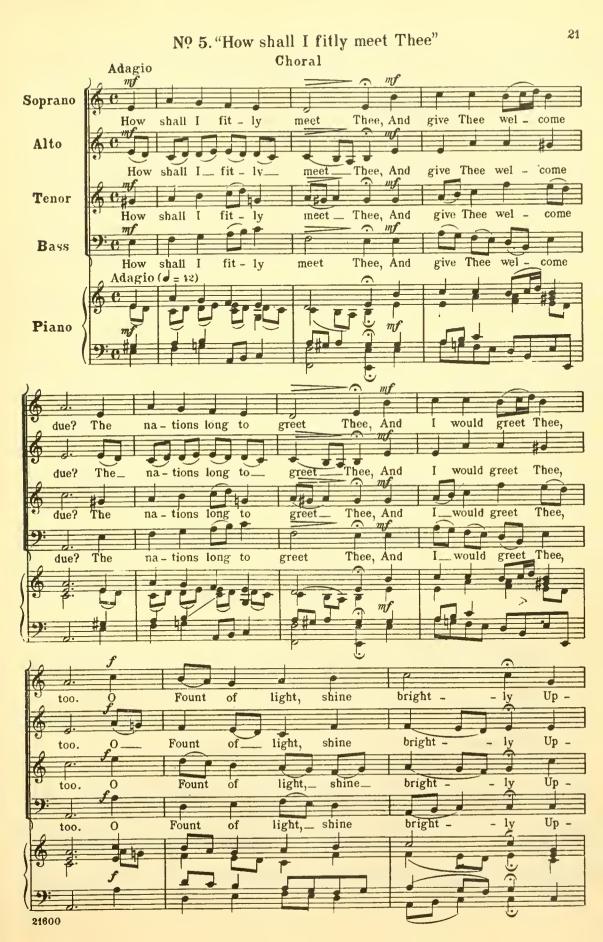


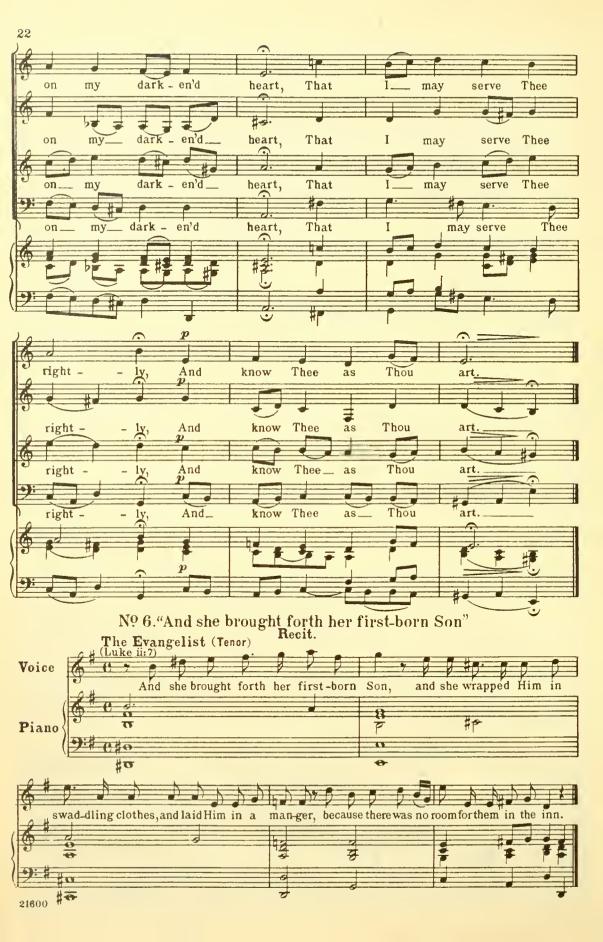










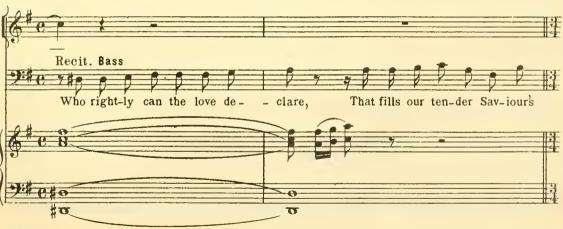










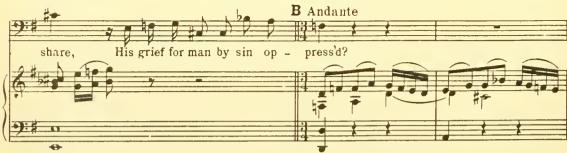






























Nº 8."Mighty Lord, and King all-glorious" Aria











































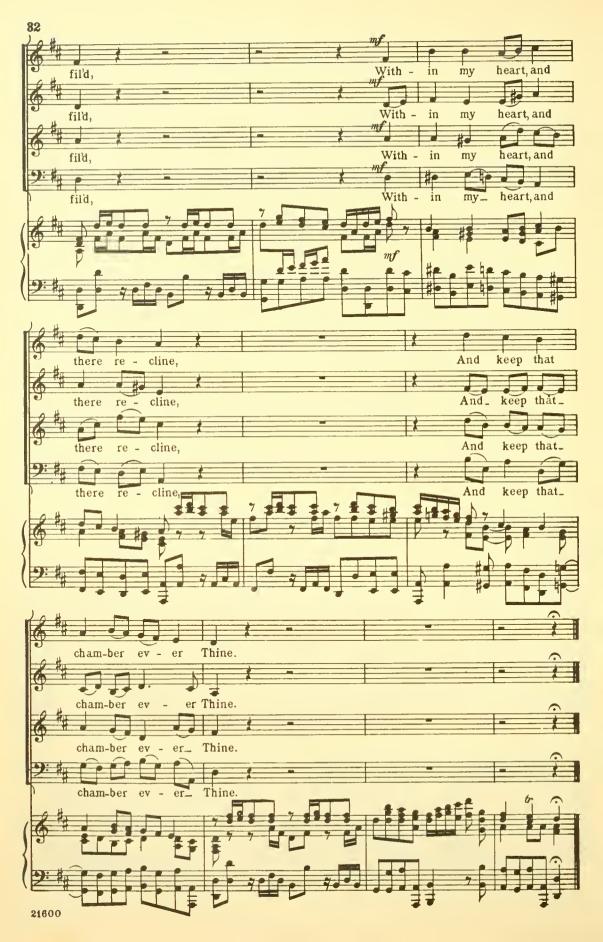


Nº 9. "Ah! dearest Jesus"





GENEI



Part II

On the Second Day of the Festival of Christmas

Nº 10. Symphony















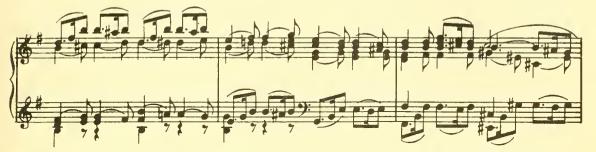










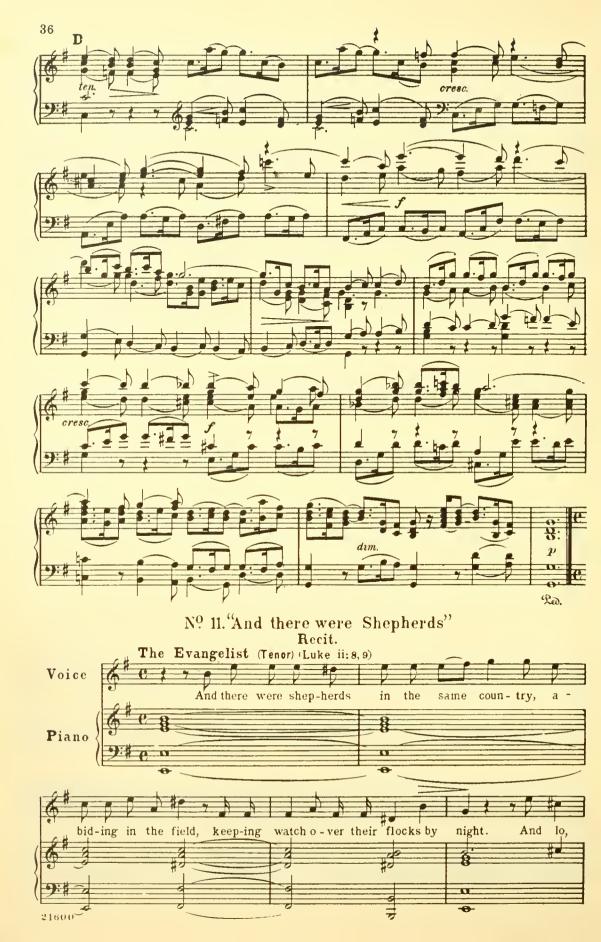


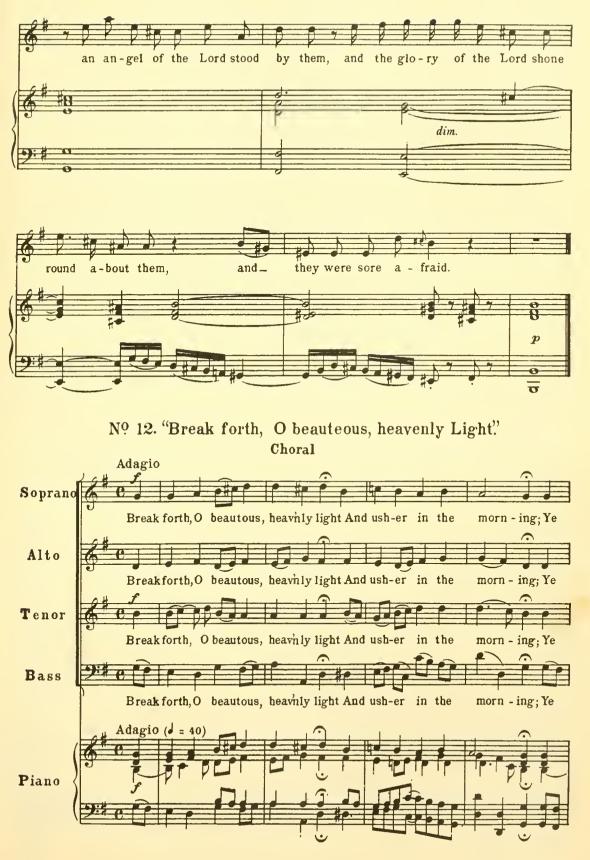


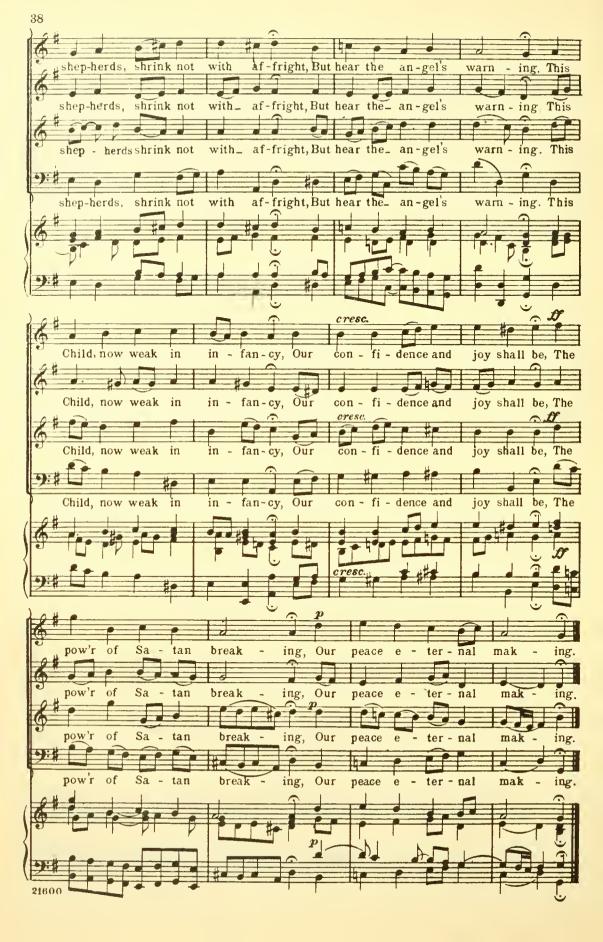




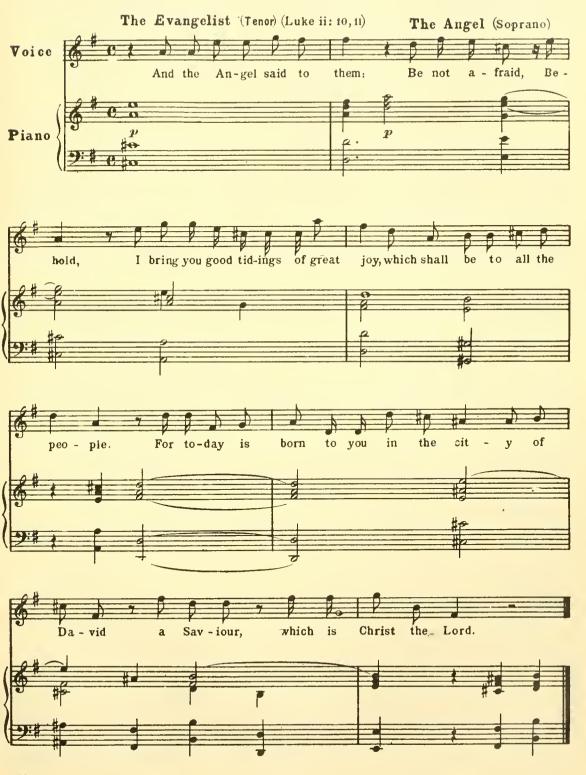


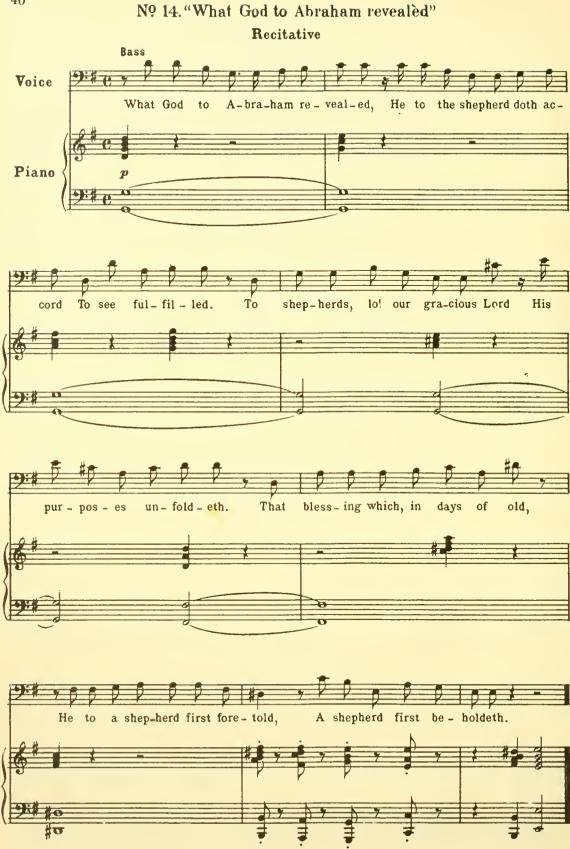




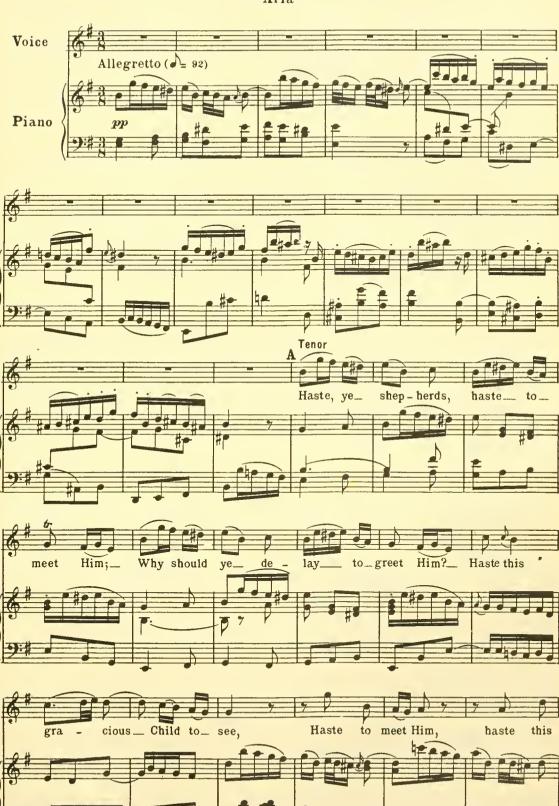


Nº 13. "And the Angel said to them" Recitative

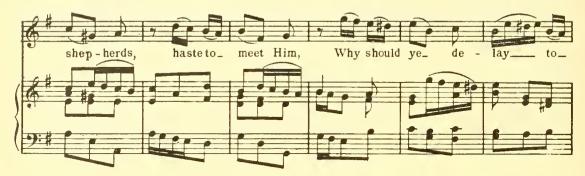




Nº 15. "Haste, ye Shepherds" Aria















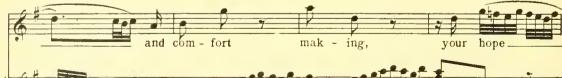








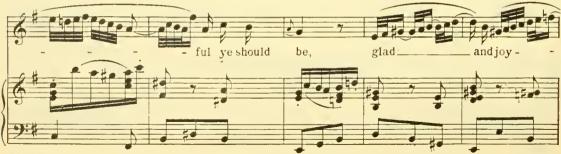












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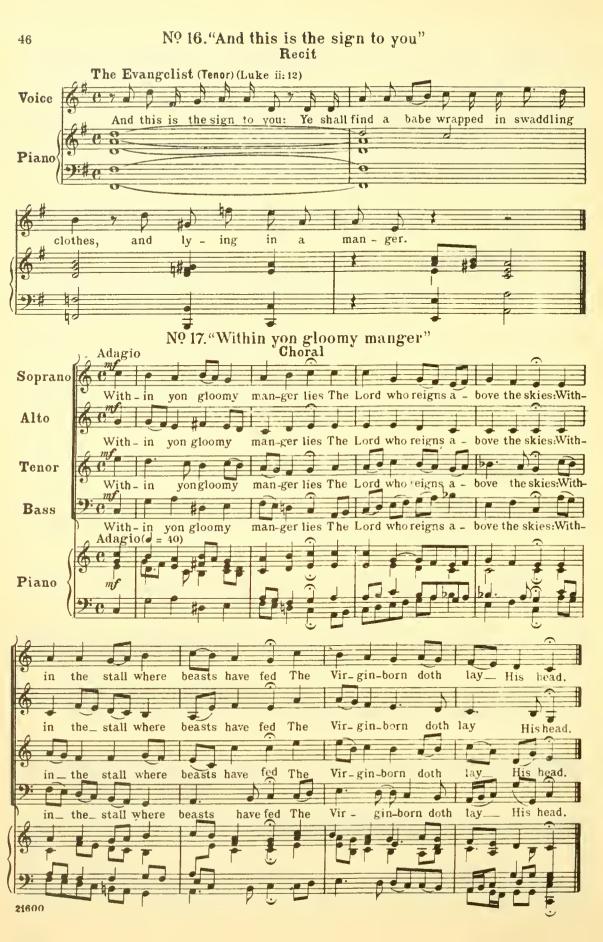




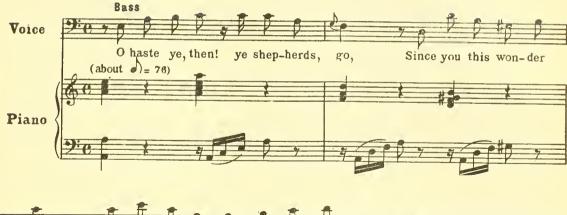








Nº 18."O haste ye, then" Recitative









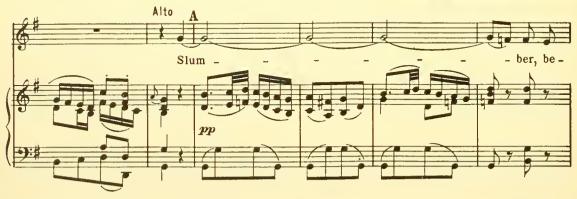
Nº 19. "Slumber, belovèd" Aria



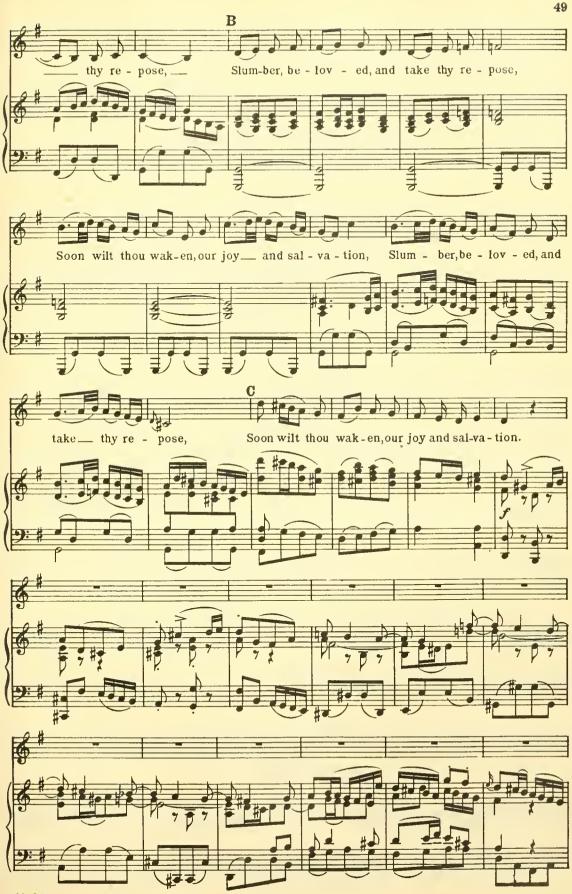


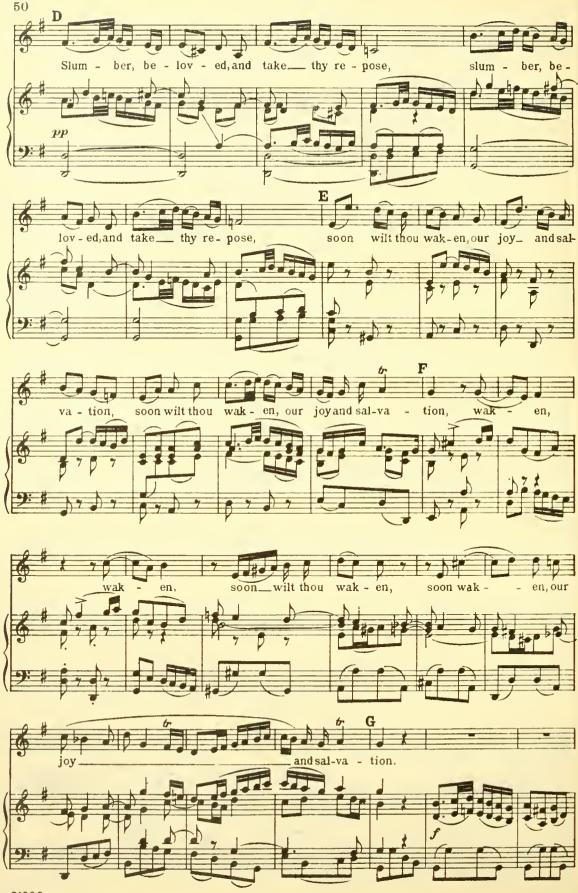






















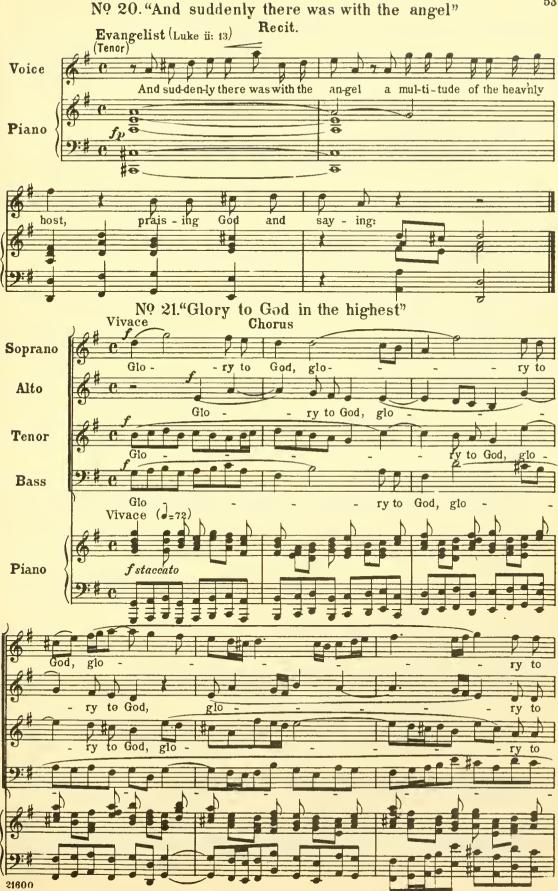


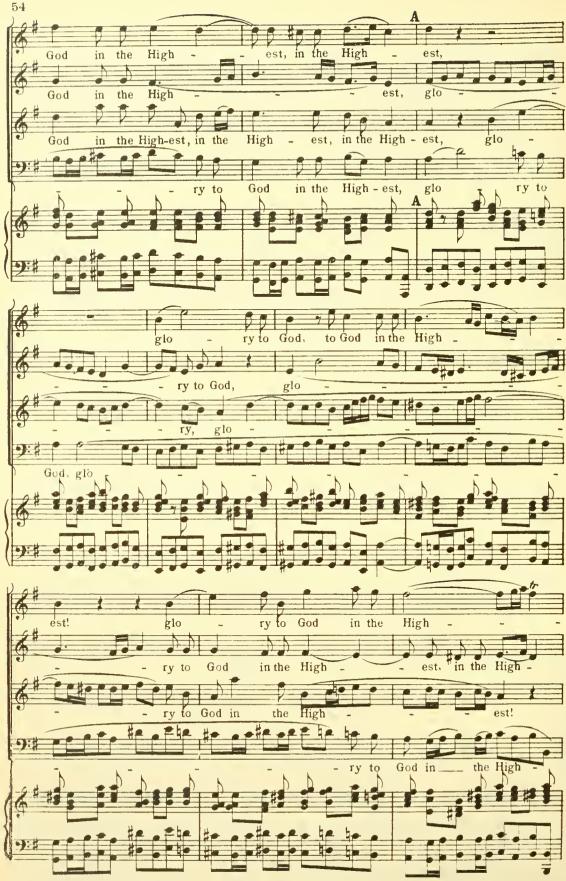


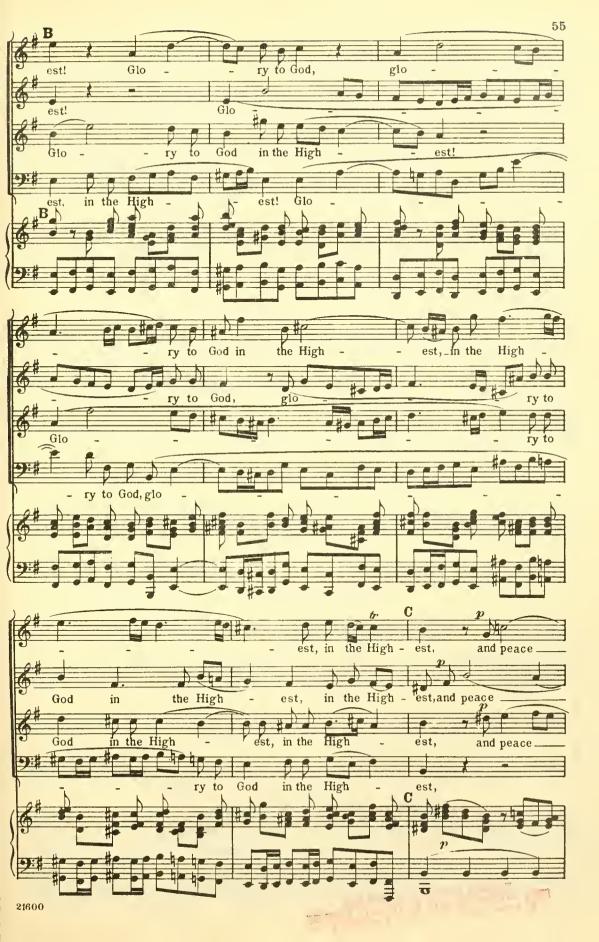


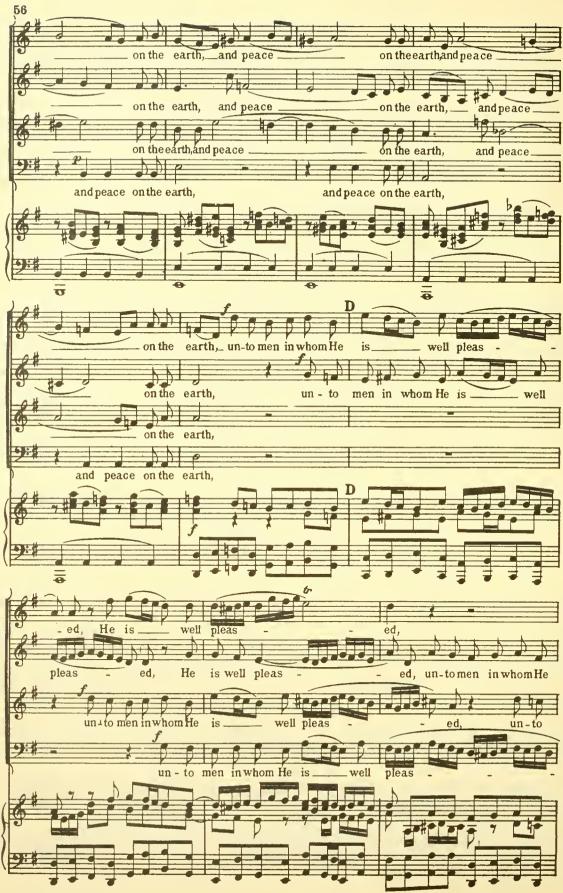




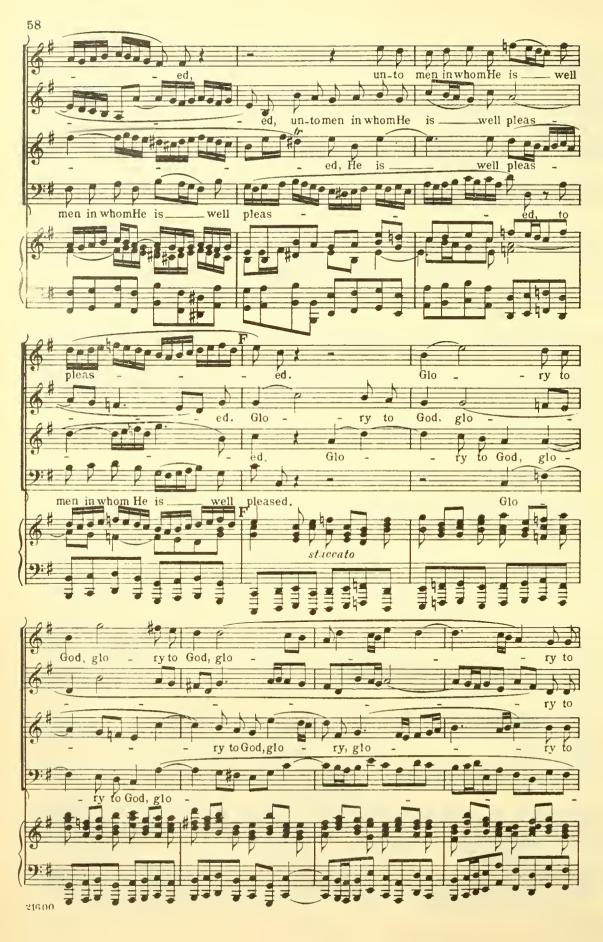


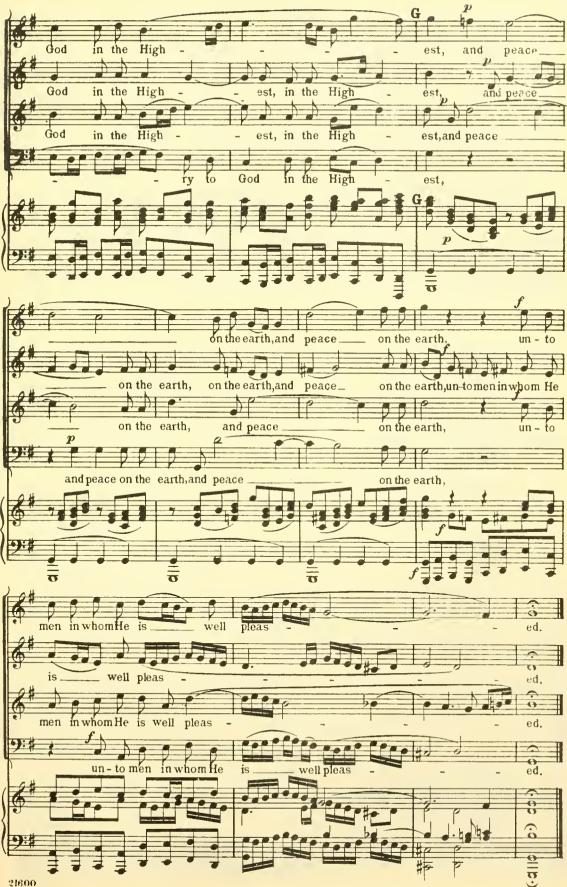




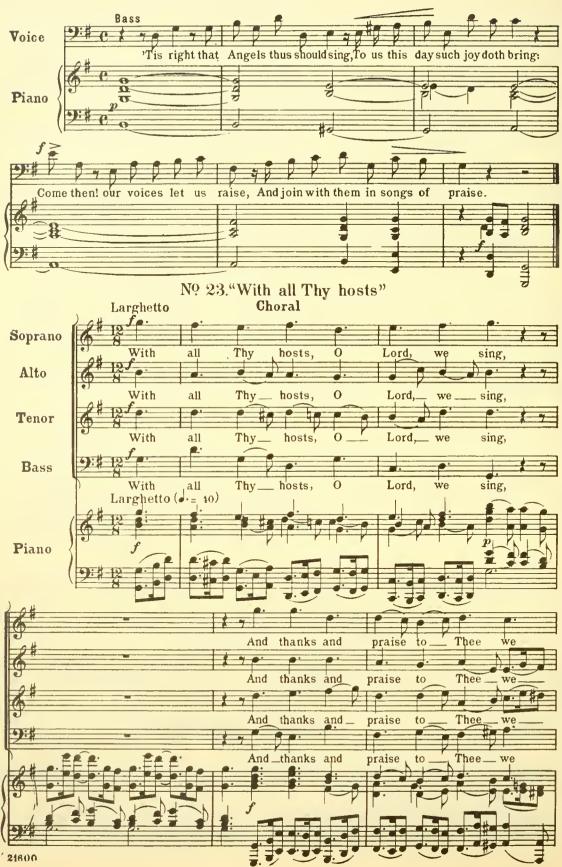


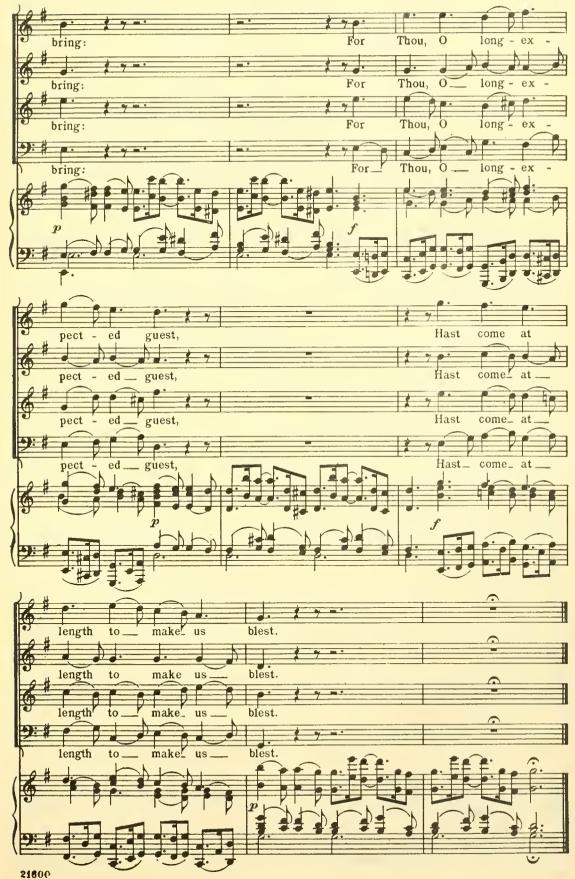




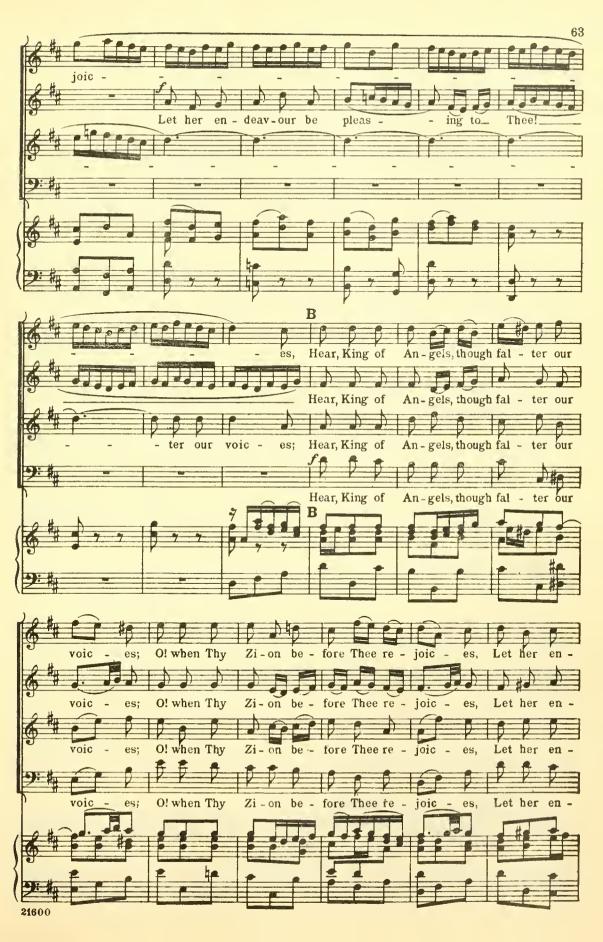


Nº 22."Tis right that Angels thus should sing" Recit.

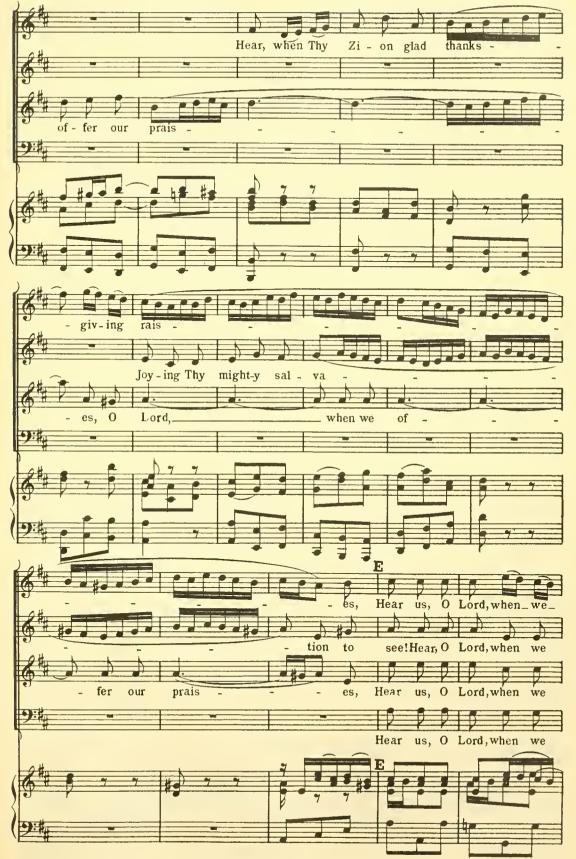


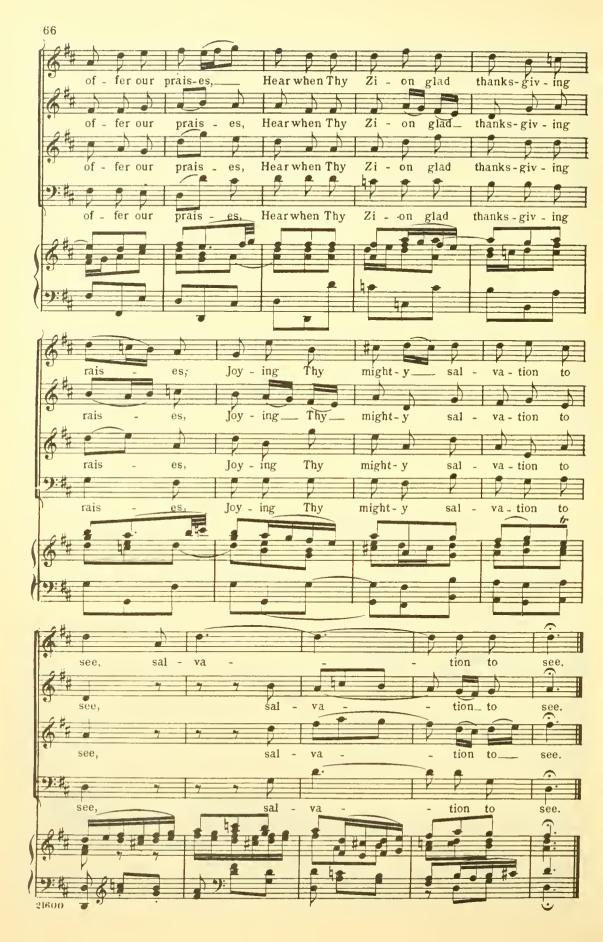


62 Part III On the Third Day of the Festival of Christmas N? 24. "Hear, King of Angels" Chorus Allegretto (d= 100) **P**iano Soprano Alto Tenor Hear, King of gels, though An-Bass O! when Thy fore Thee re -Zi on_ be --fal though ter_ our_ voic - es, Ť.

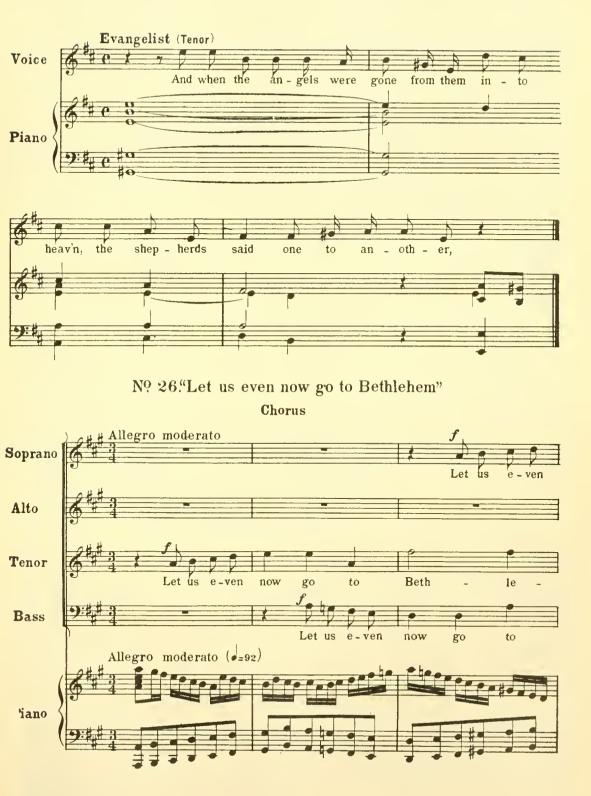


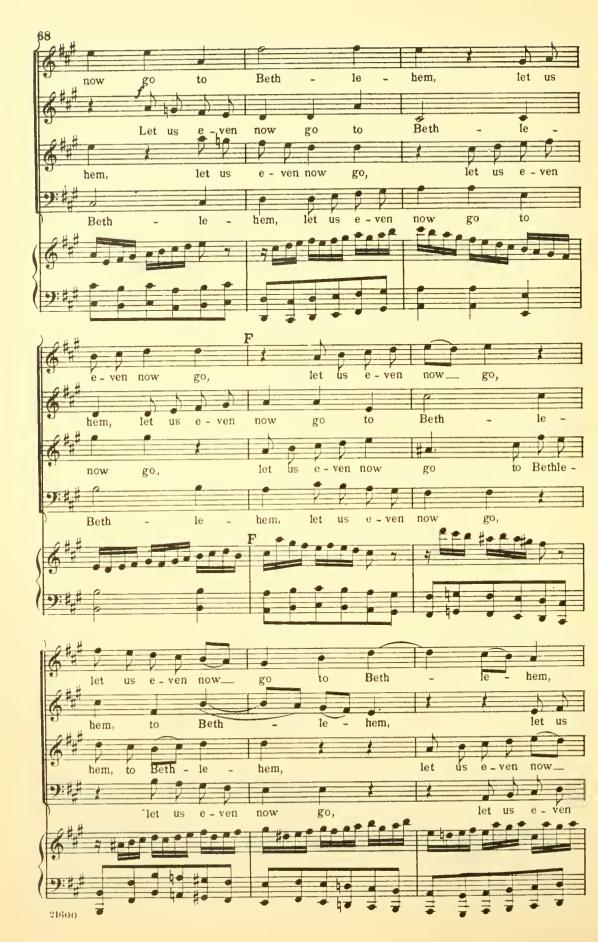


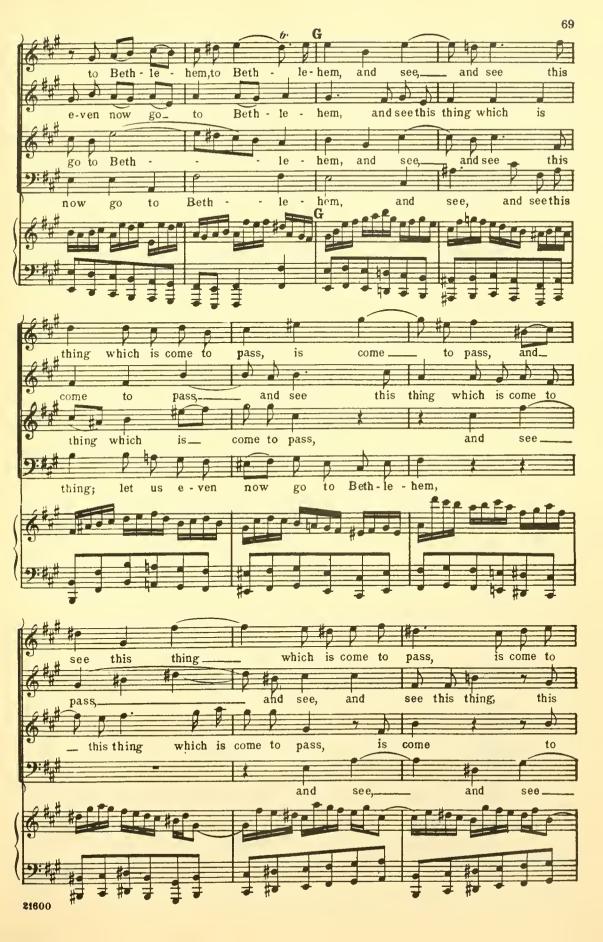




Nº 25. "And when the angels" Becit.



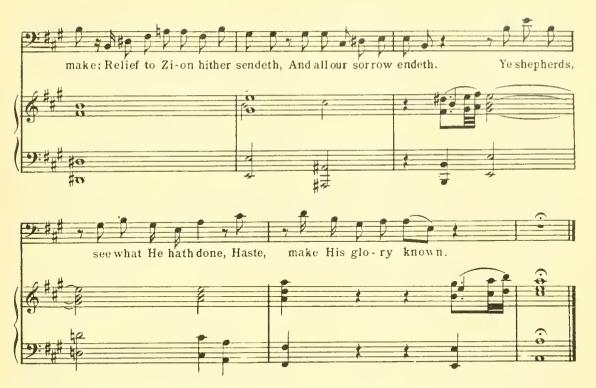






Nº 27. "He bids us comfort take" Recitative

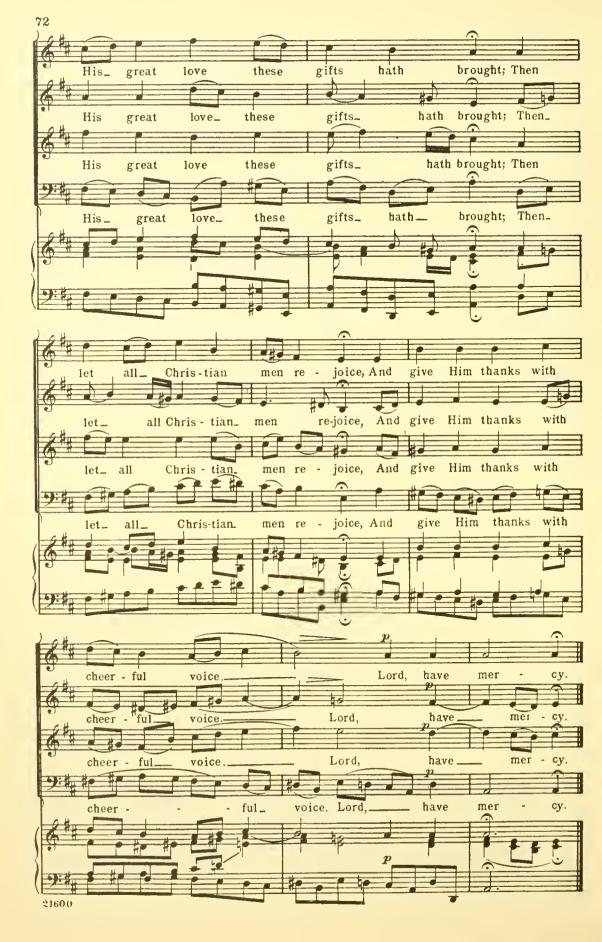




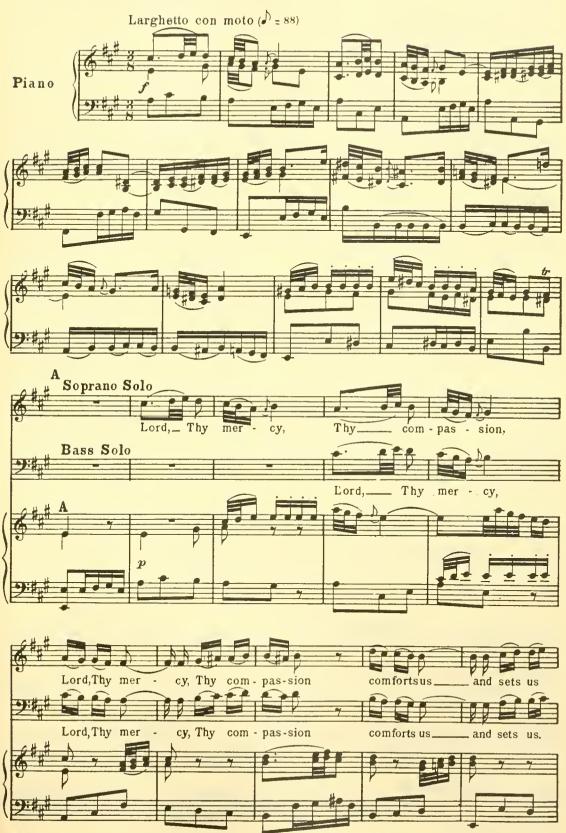
Nº 28."The Lord hath all these wonders wrought"





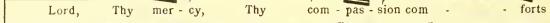


Nº 29. "Lord, Thy mercy" Duet



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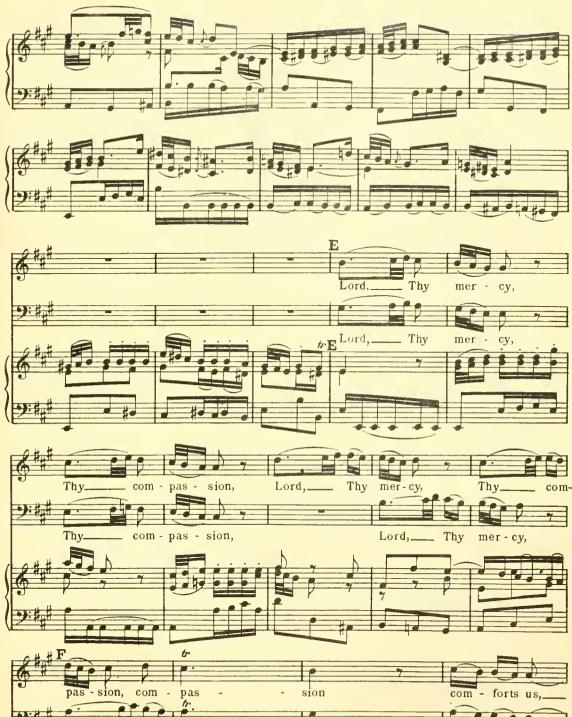


















































Nº 30. "And they came with haste" Recitative



Nº 31. "Keep, O my spirit" Aria















































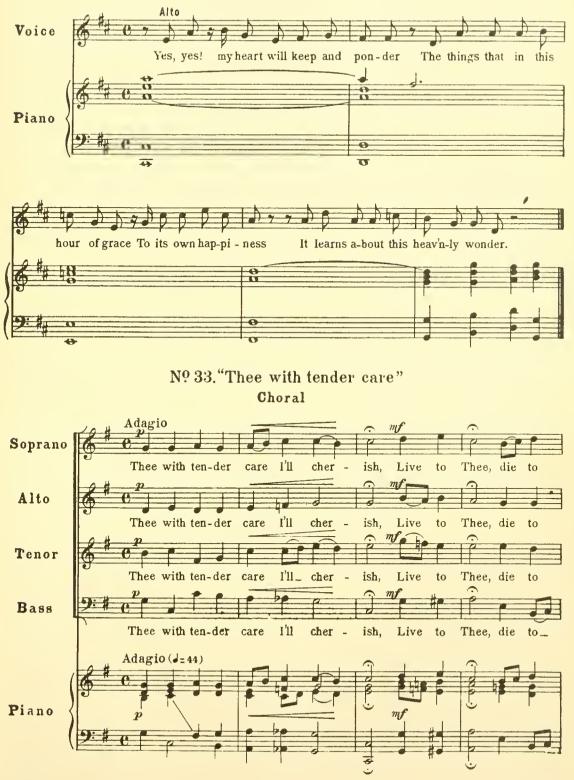




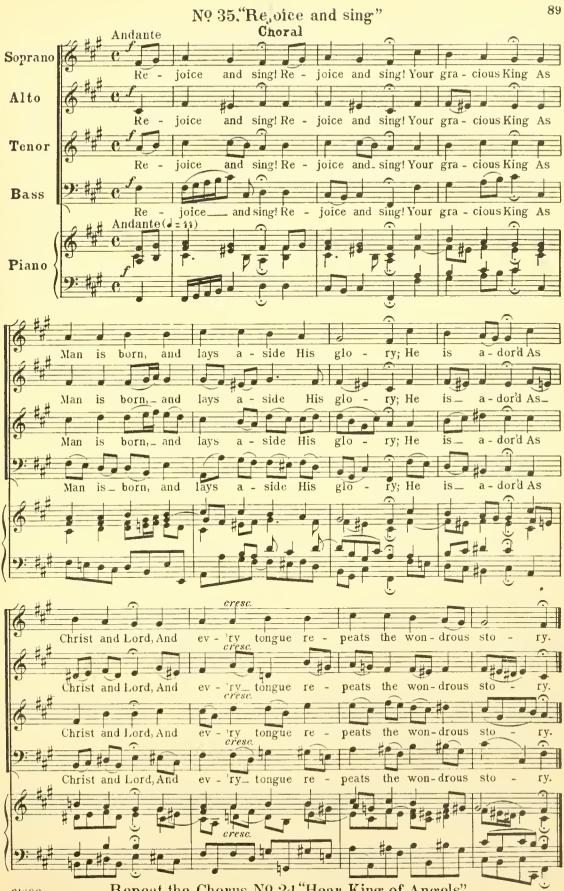




Nº 32. "Yes, yes! my heart" Recitative



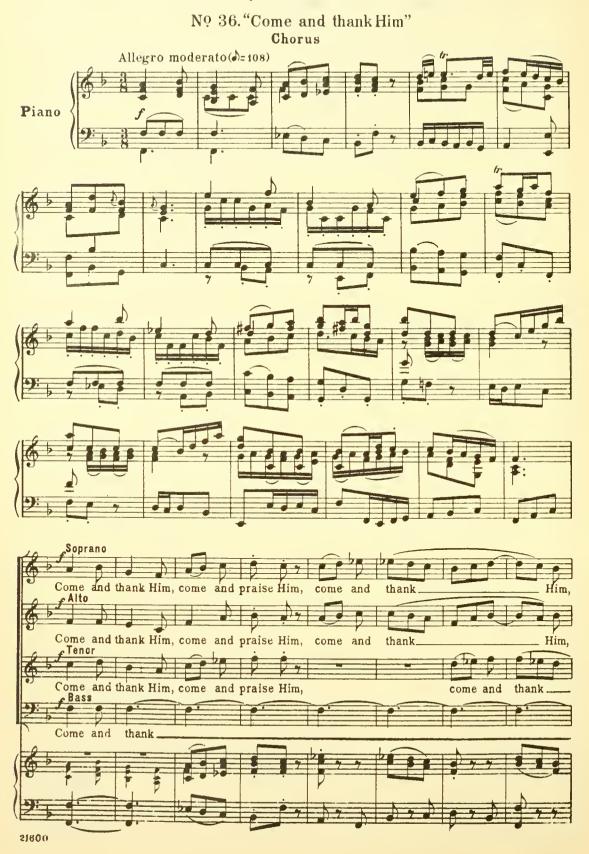




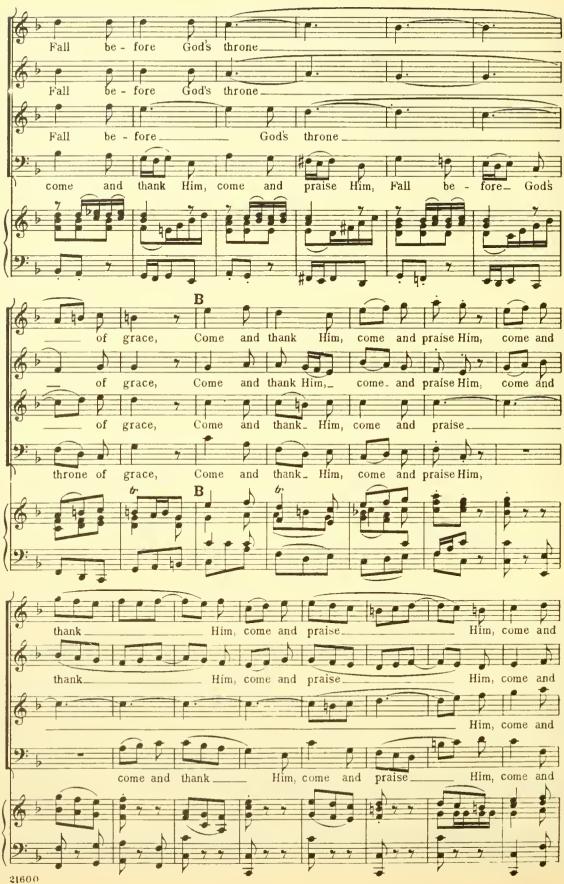
Repeat the Chorus Nº 24,"Hear, King of Angels"

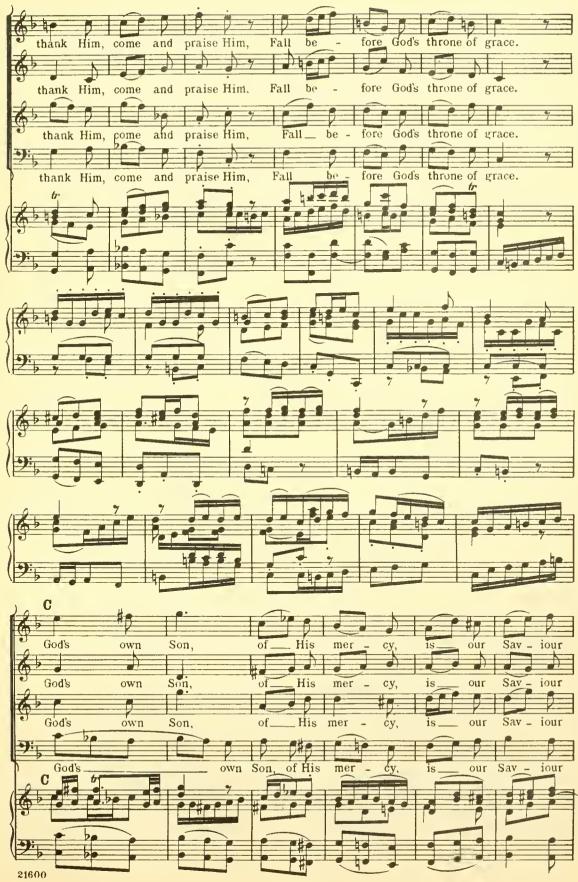
Part IV

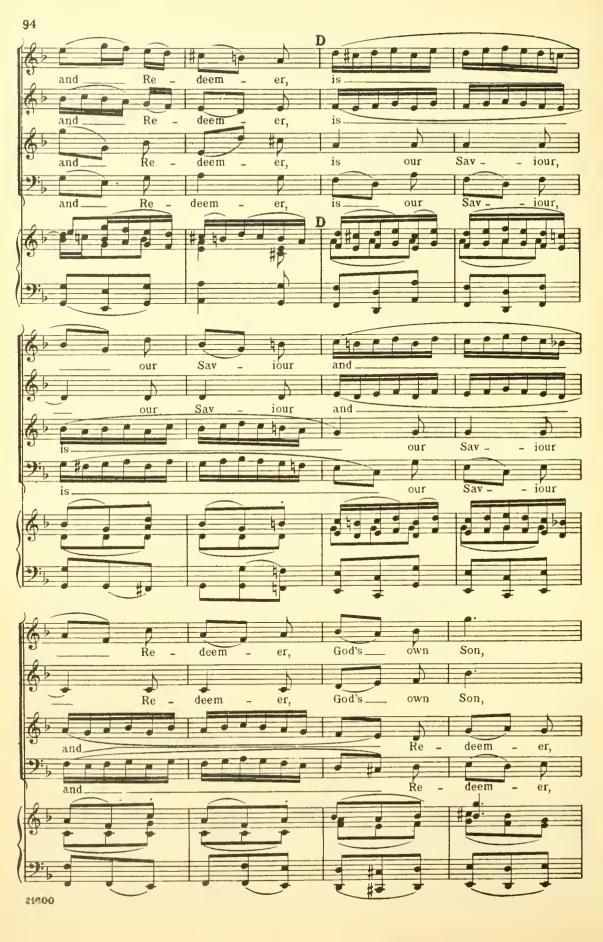
On New Year's Day, the Festival of the Circumcision

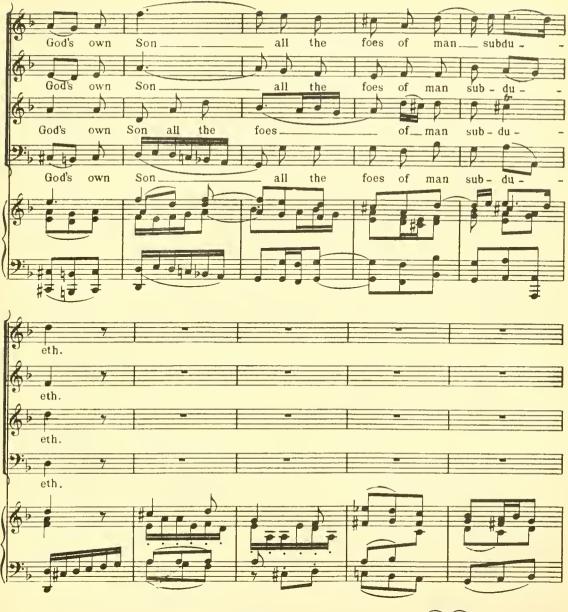












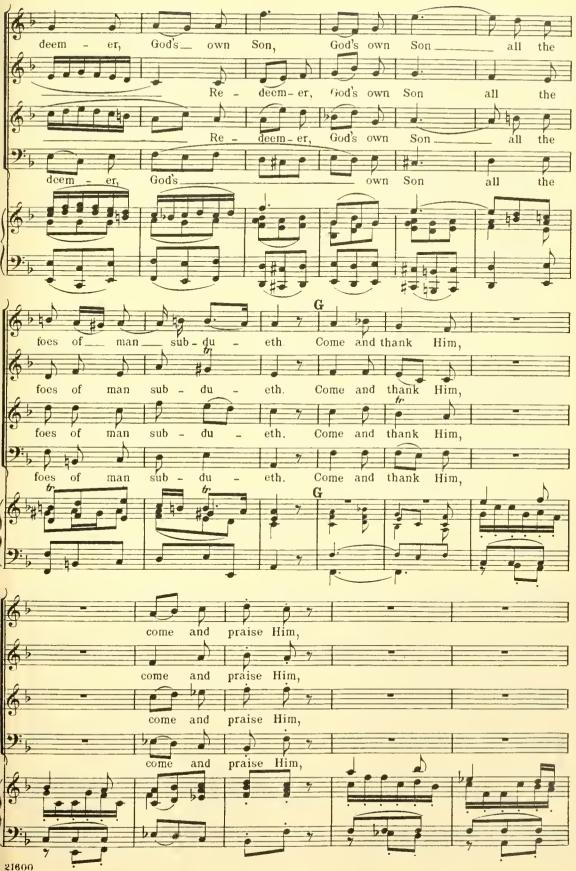


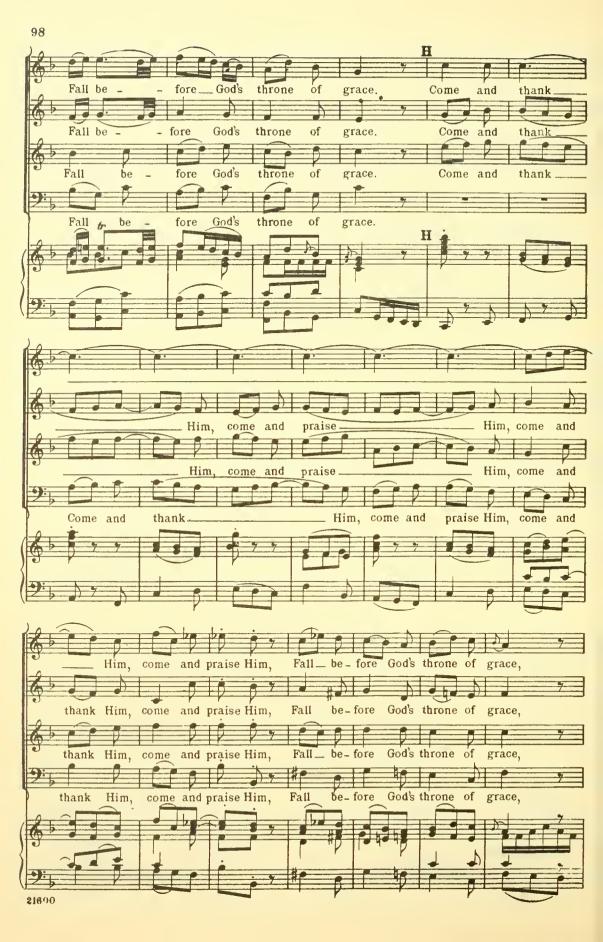


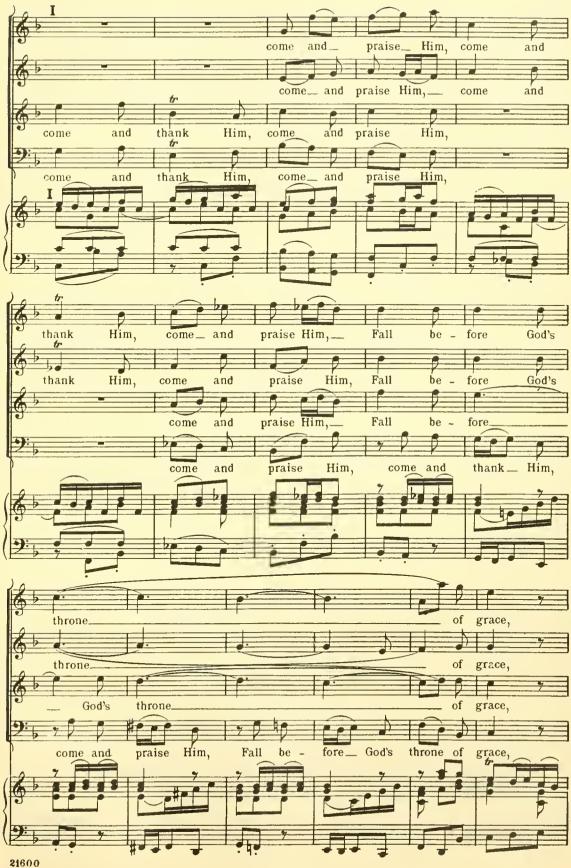


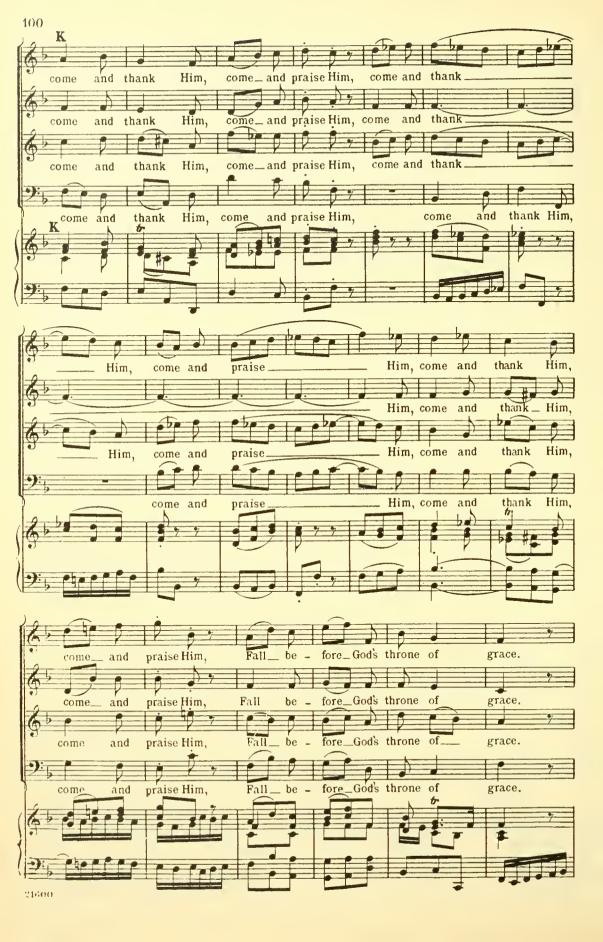














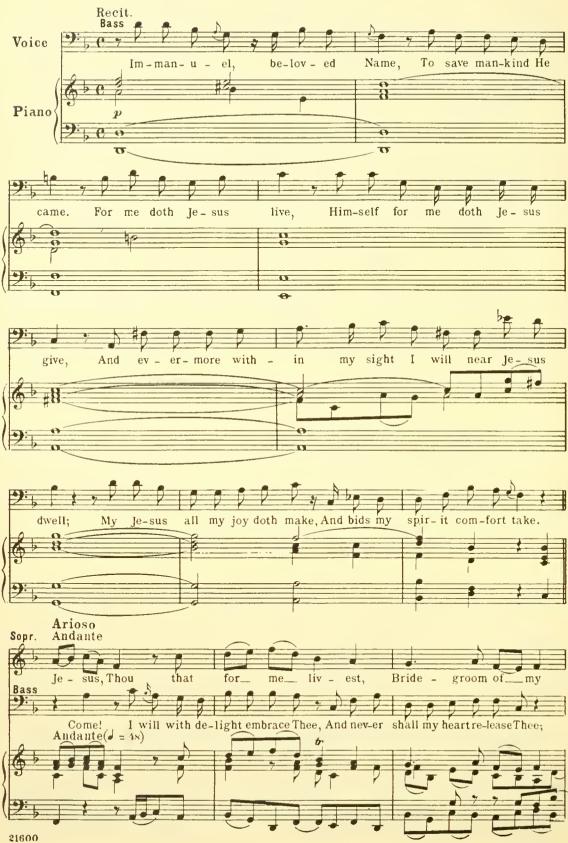


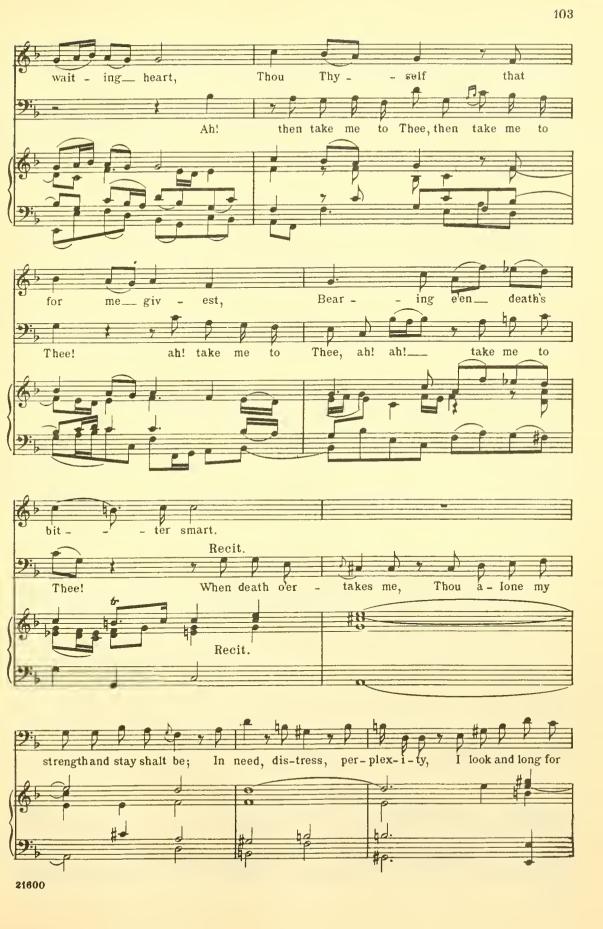


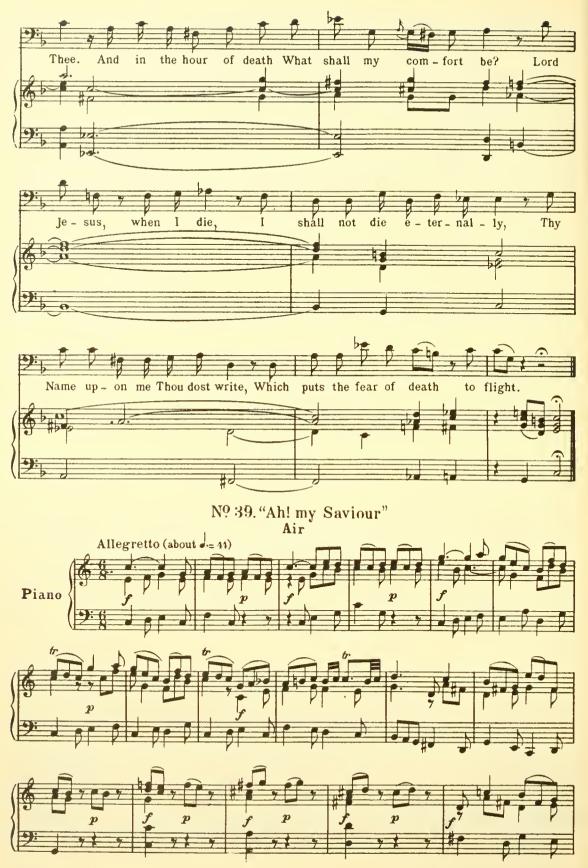
N9·37. "And when eight days were fulfilled" Recitative



N? 38."Immanuel, belovèd Name" Duet













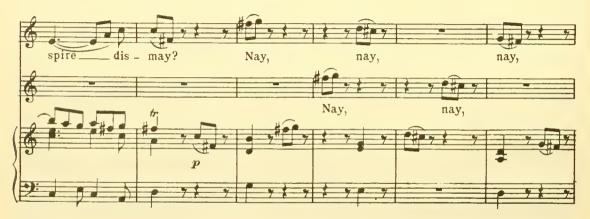










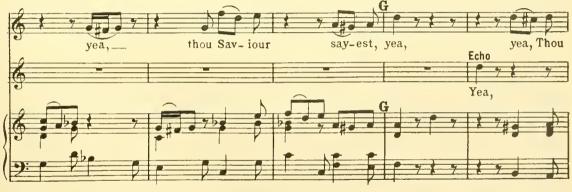


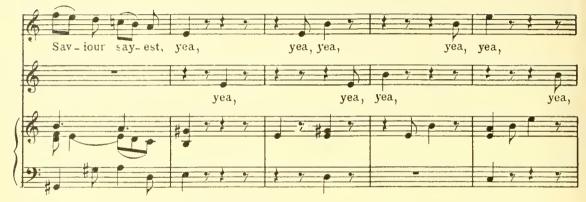


































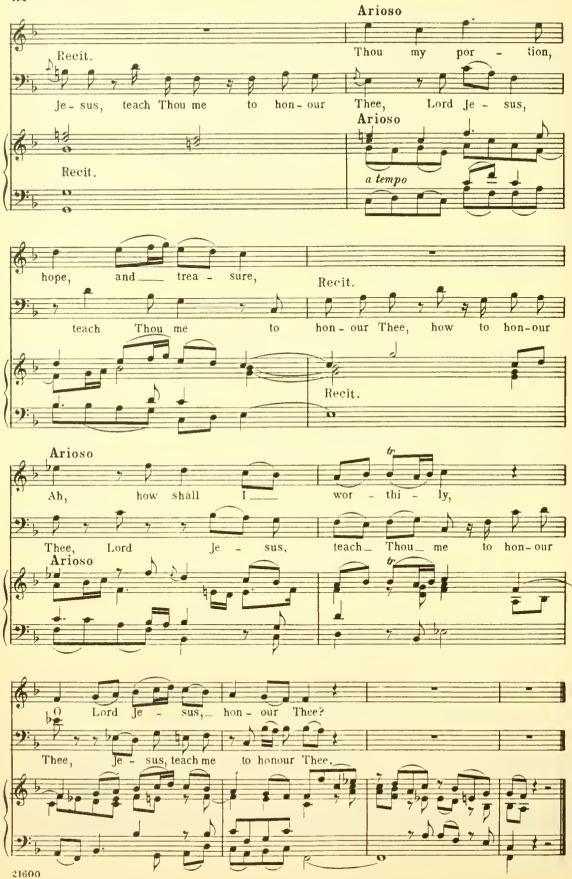
Nº 40. "Tis well! Thy Name, O Lord" Duet











Nº 41. "Tis Thee I would be praising" Air









































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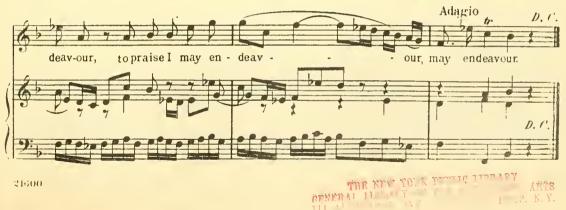






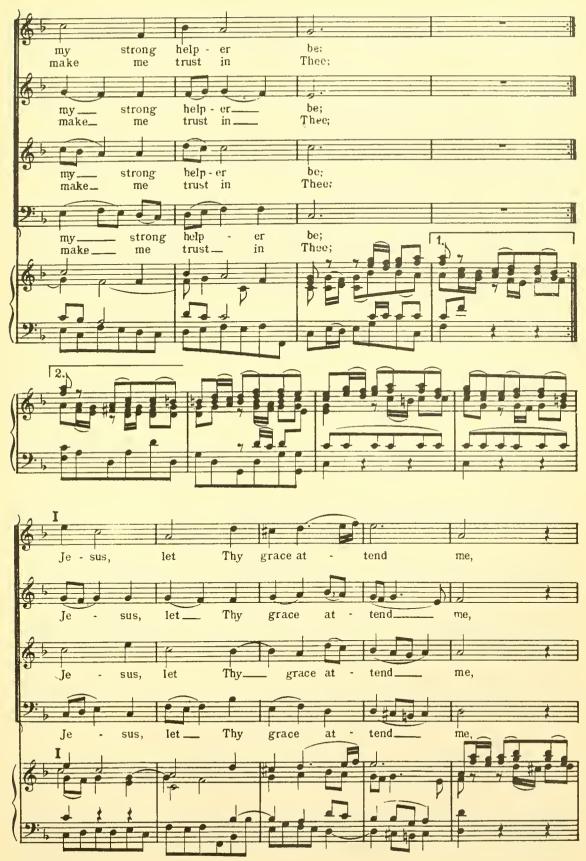




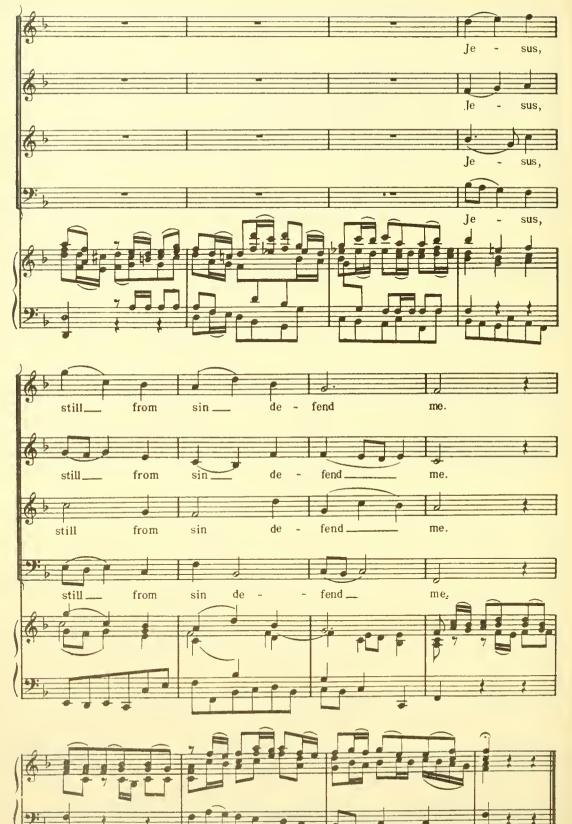


Choral





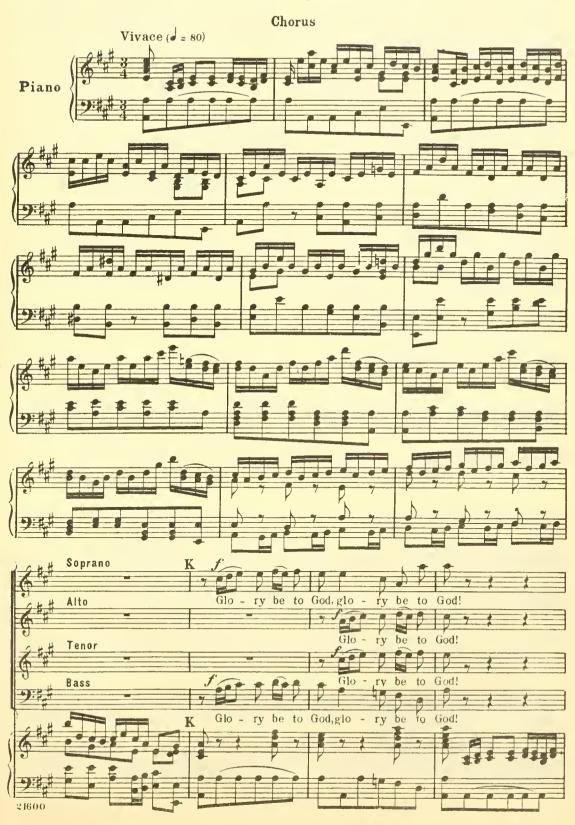
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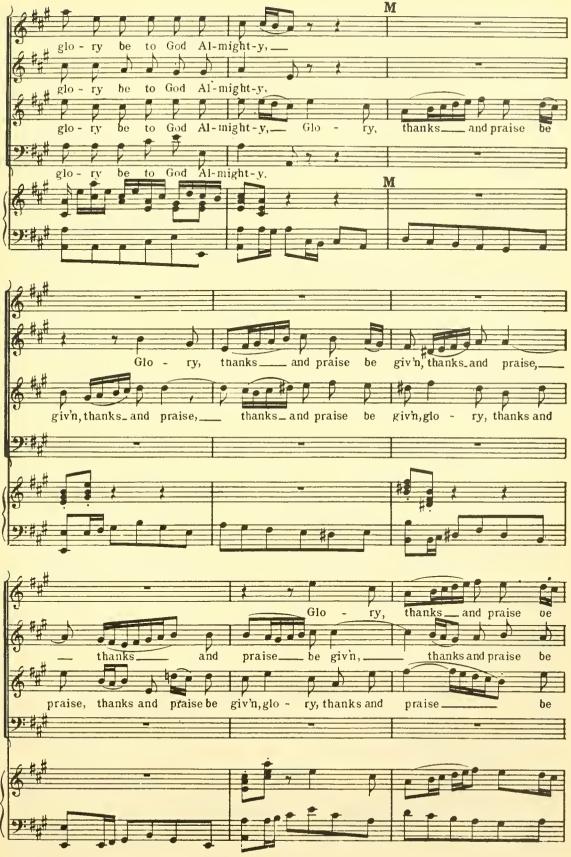
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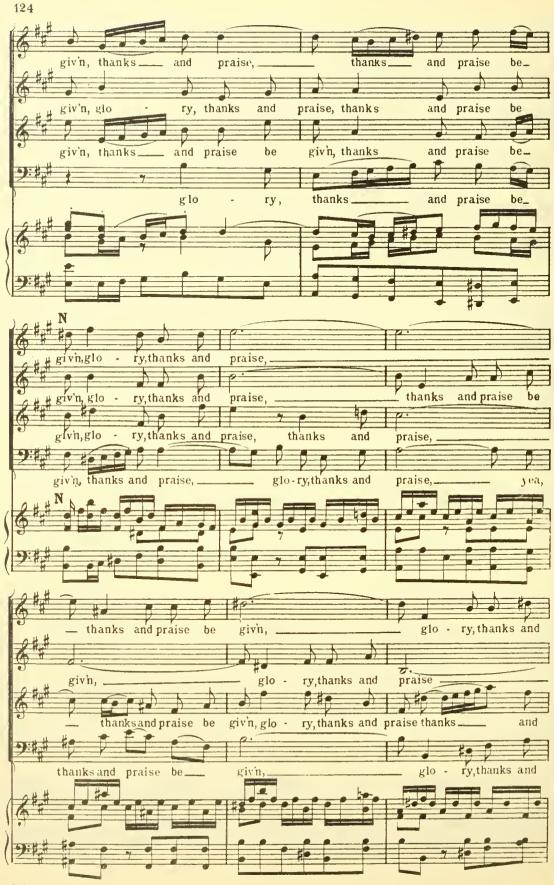
Part V

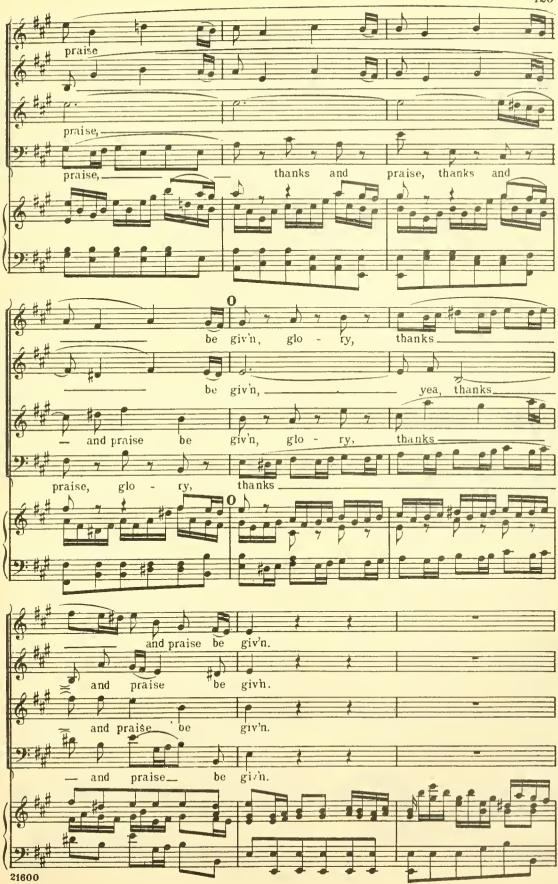
On the Sunday after New Year's Day Nº 43. "Glory be to God"

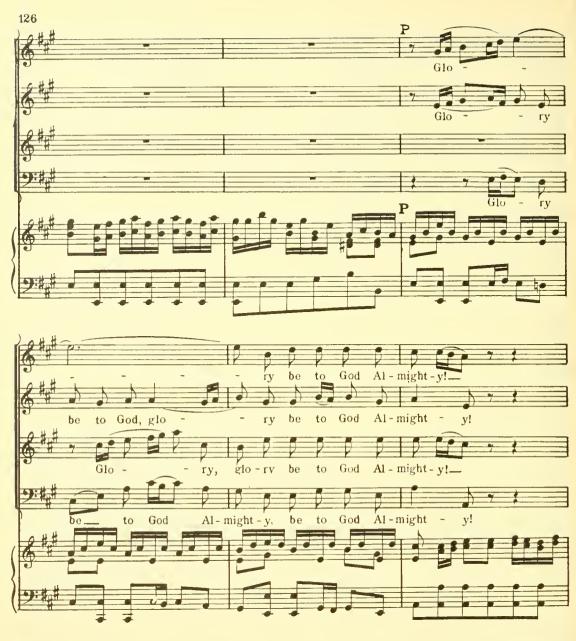


. to God Al - might - y,. be glo ٢v ľ, God Al - might be glo - ry be to ry to y, £ . . ħ --. God Al - might - y,ry glo be glo - rv be to to 9:4 A1 - might 9 glo y, be God rу to T God AI glo be to God. glo be to 'nу ry 5 be ß ry God. God A1 to glo - ry God, glo be to D D ۴ŋ -4 . God, glo be God A1 ry be glo - ry to to God.):#₄# E D 7 be God, glo to God A1glo гу to ry be . 4 * ð Hmight - y,_ be to God, glo - ry A 17 . glo - ry be to God might - y,_ Þ ry be to God, glo - ry be to God, 'y, might glo -. PEPPE ł glo - ry be to God, glo - ry be to God, might y, astrater, 7 7 7 -- 84 ST ÷

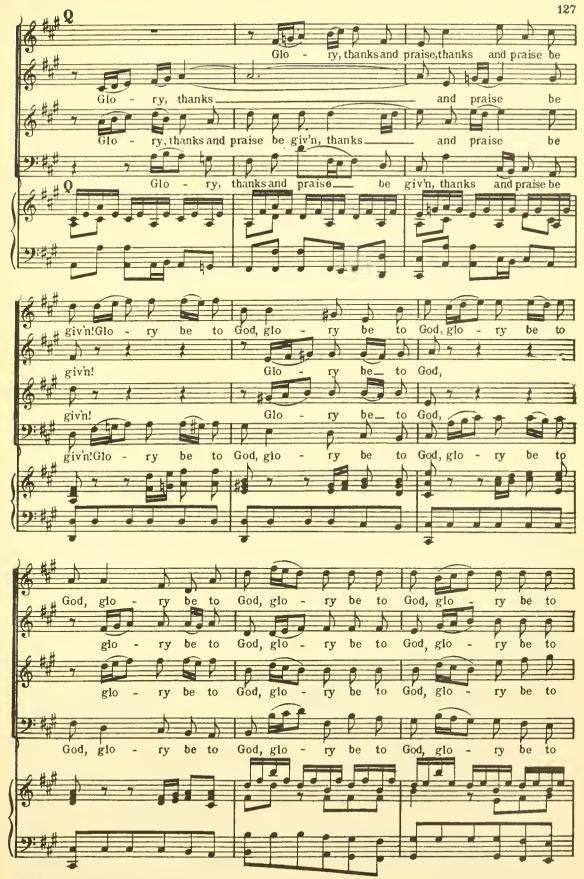




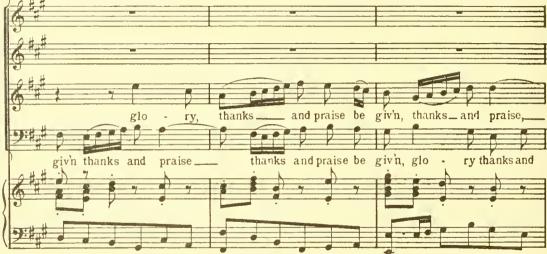






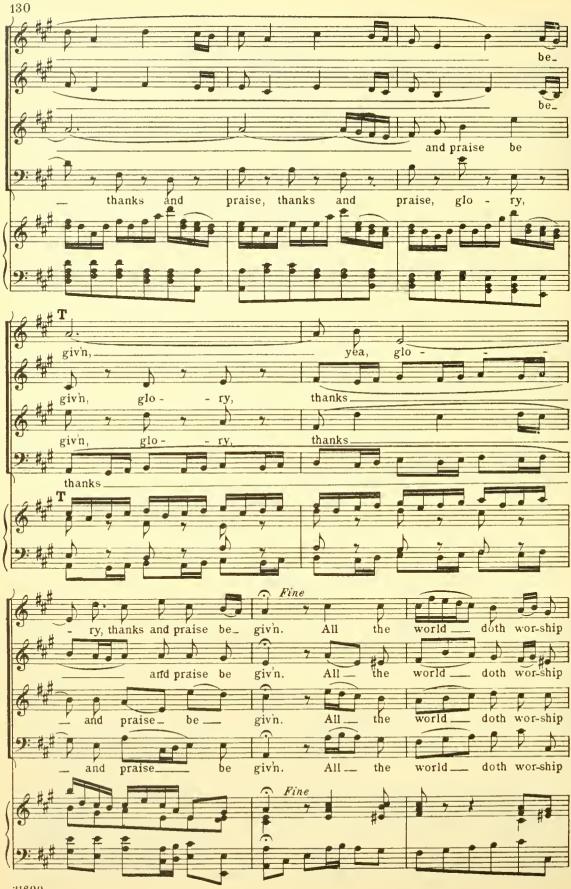






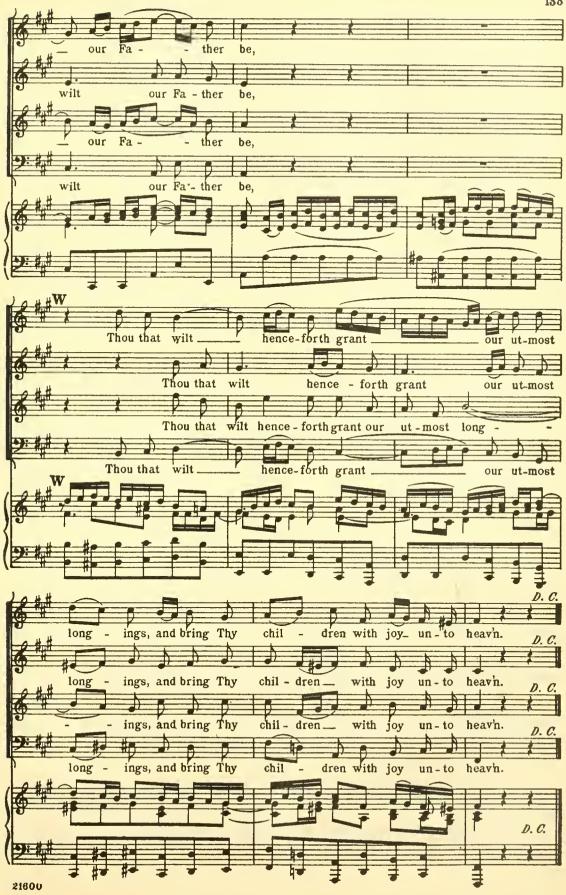


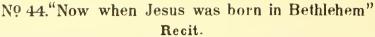


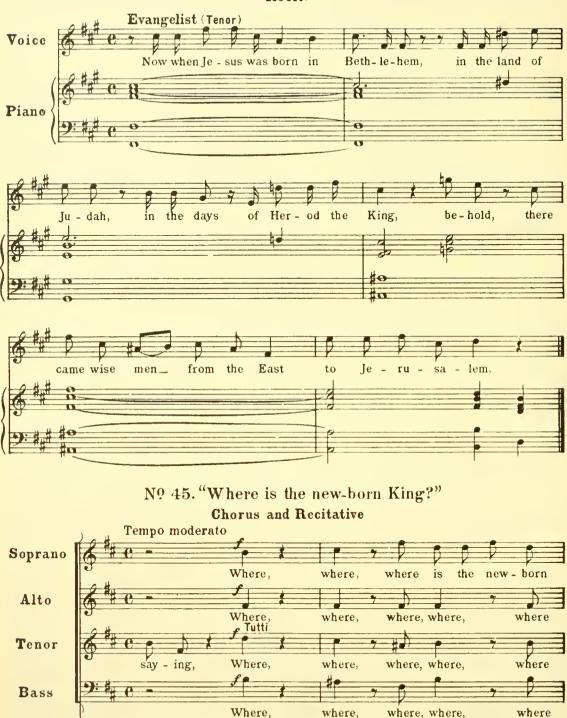














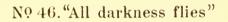
135 J is the new-born King, the King of the of the Jews? Where King, the King 7 King, the King the born of the Jews? where is born ie new the new -Jews? is the newborn King. the King of the where is the born new ſ the new-born of the Jews? is King, the King where is the born new Jews? Where, where? where, where? Recit. Alto Solo of the Jews? Where, where? Seek Him with-in my breast, For with me King, the King King, the King of the Jews? Where, where? King, of the Jews? Where, where? the King Recit. pChorus He vouch-safes to rest. we For have For His we have seen, have seen +





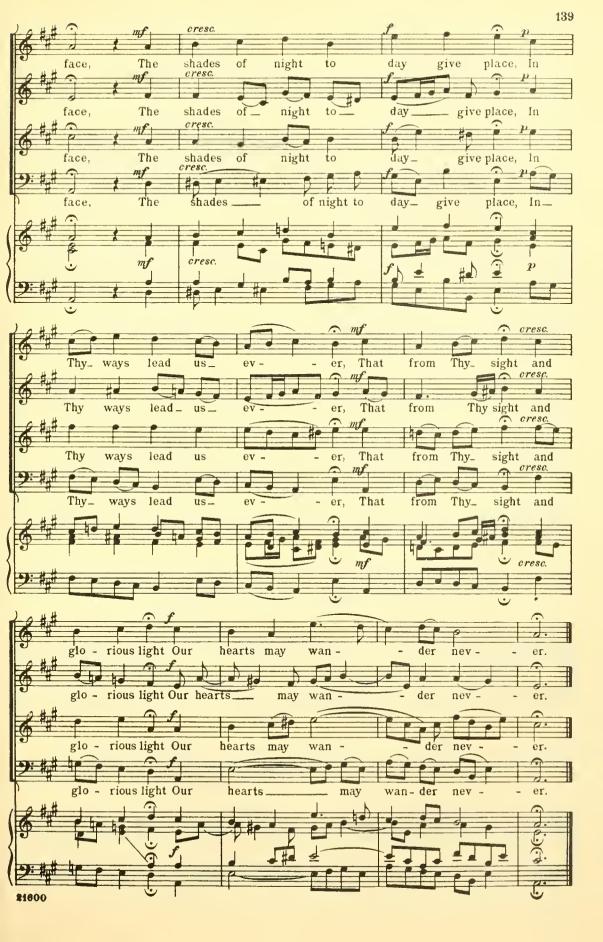




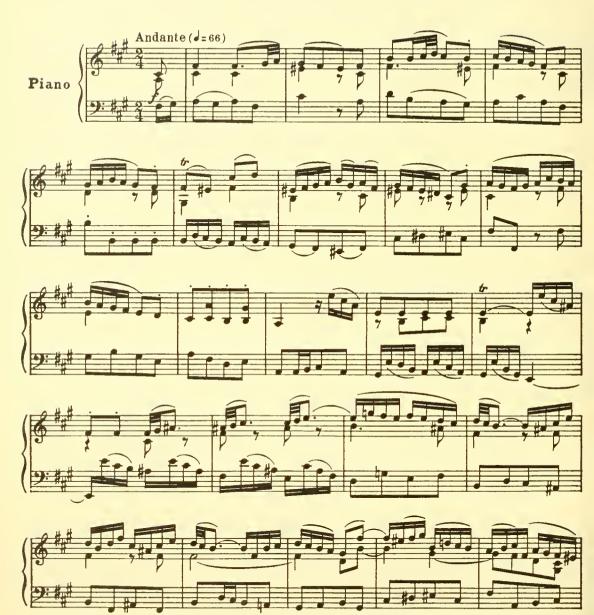


Choral





Air













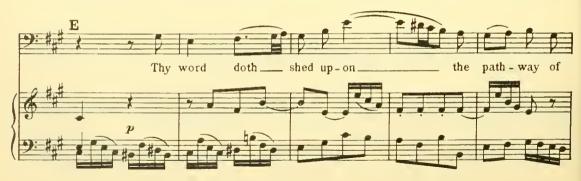






























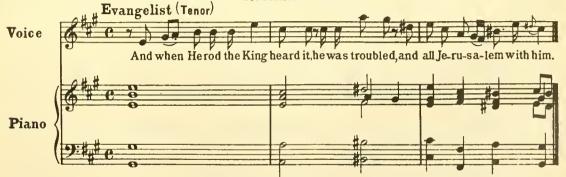








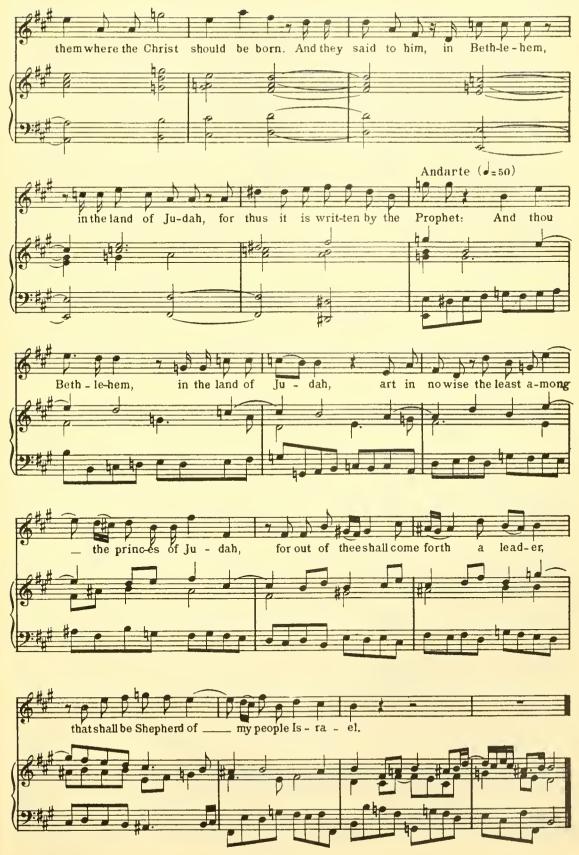
Nº 48."And when Herod the King heard it" Recitative



Nº 49."With fear why are ye taken?"

Recit.





Nº 51. "Ah! when shall we see salvation"

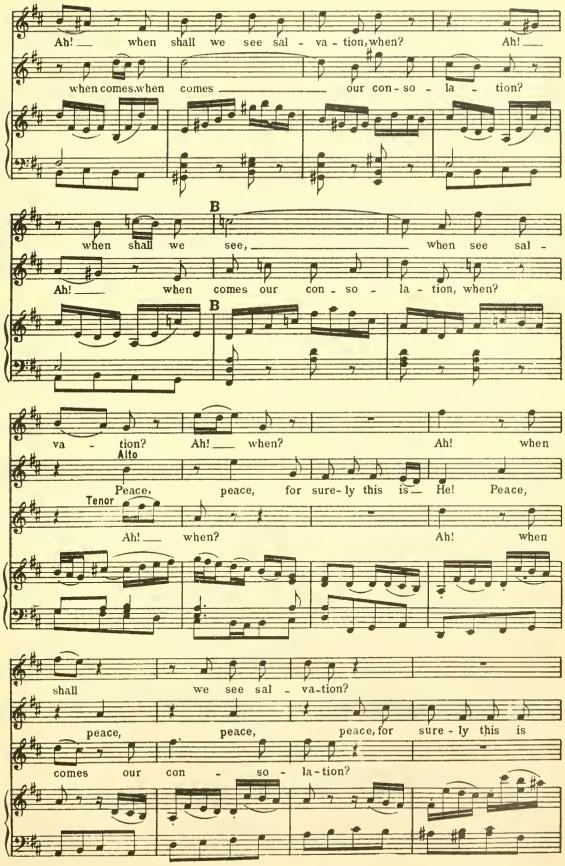






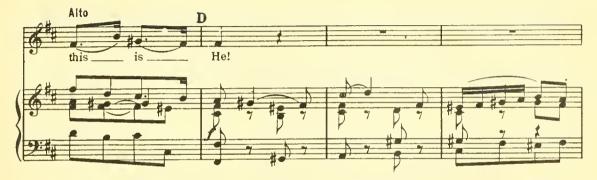






















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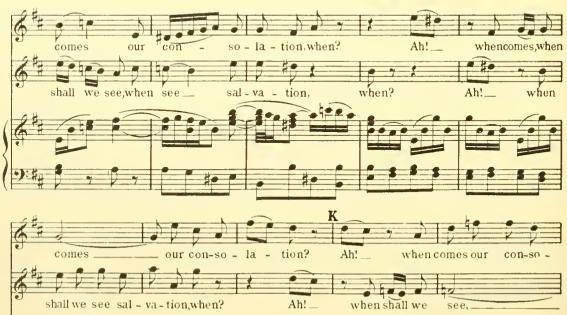




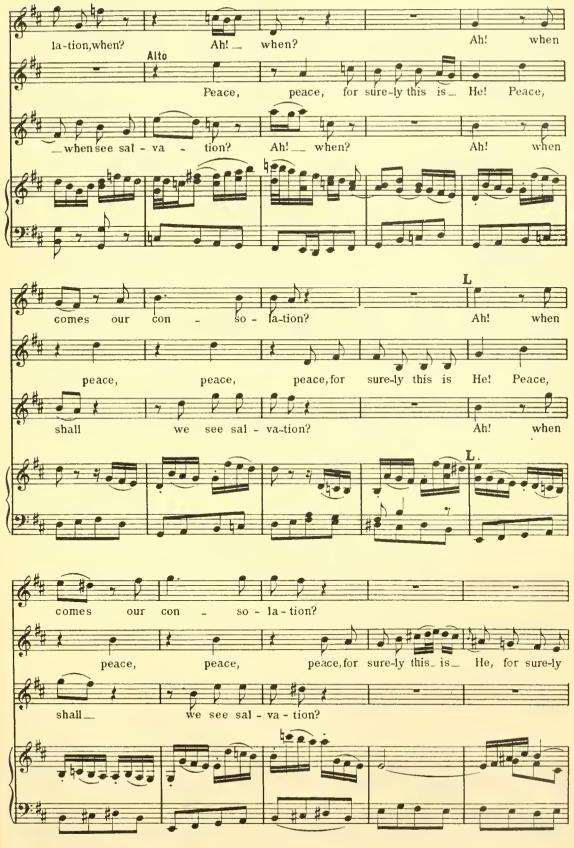














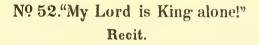




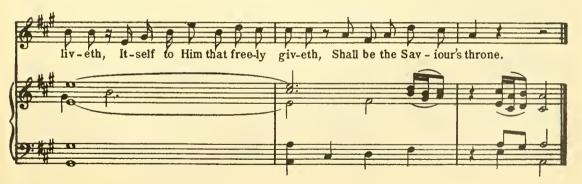


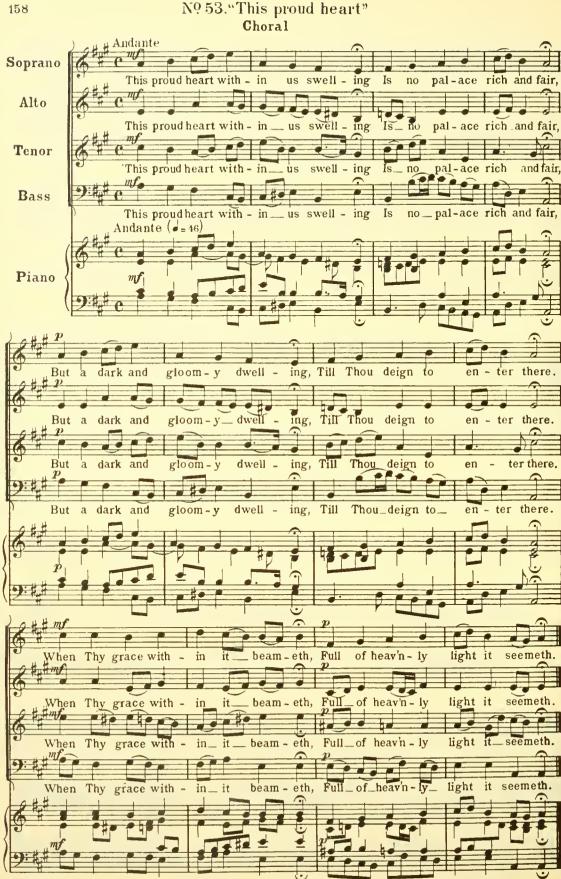


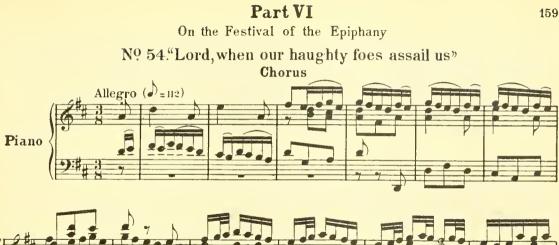






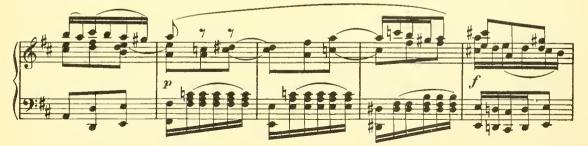














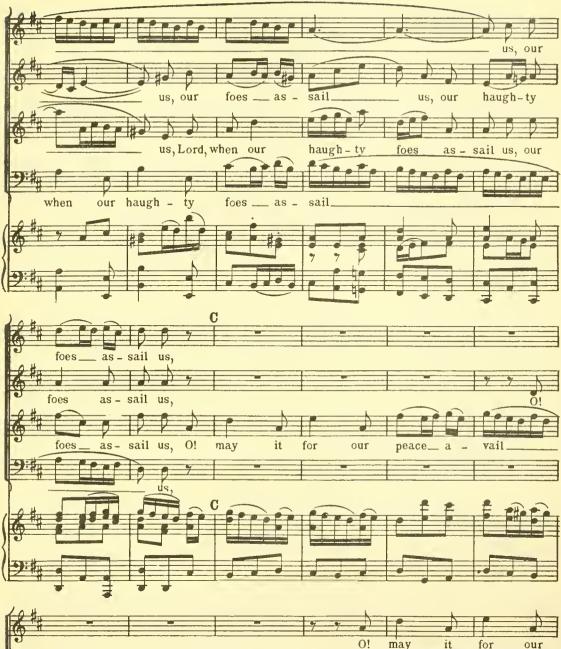




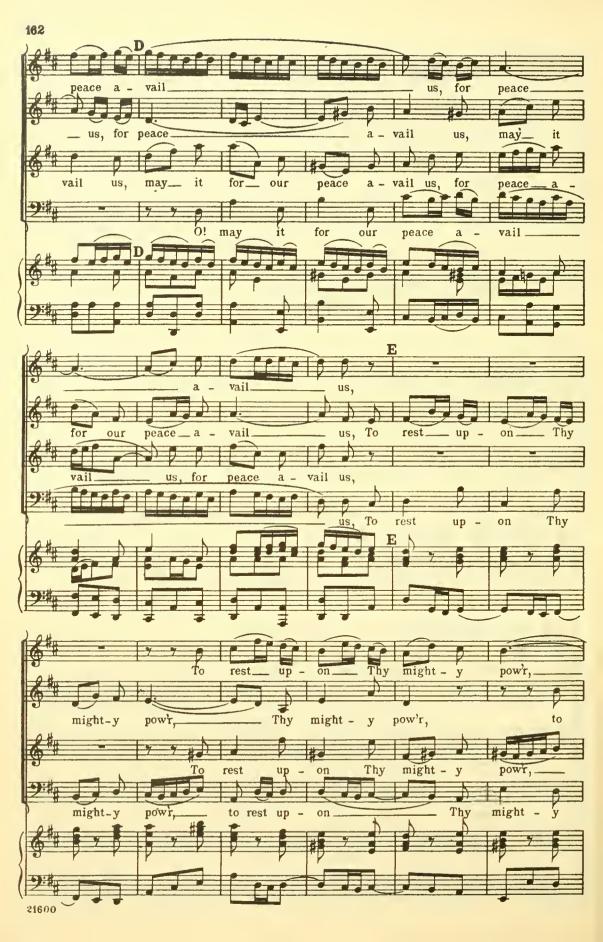










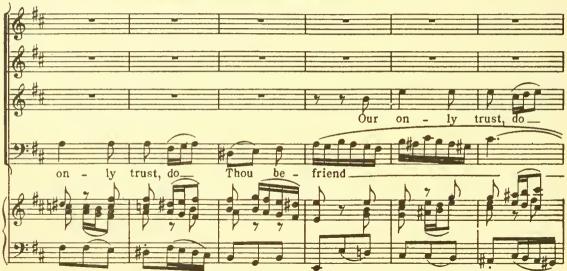




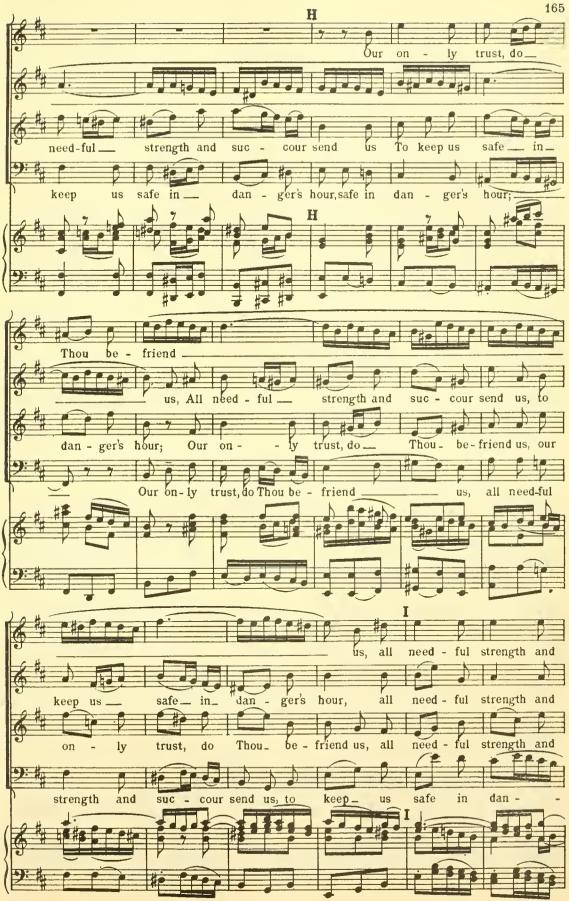


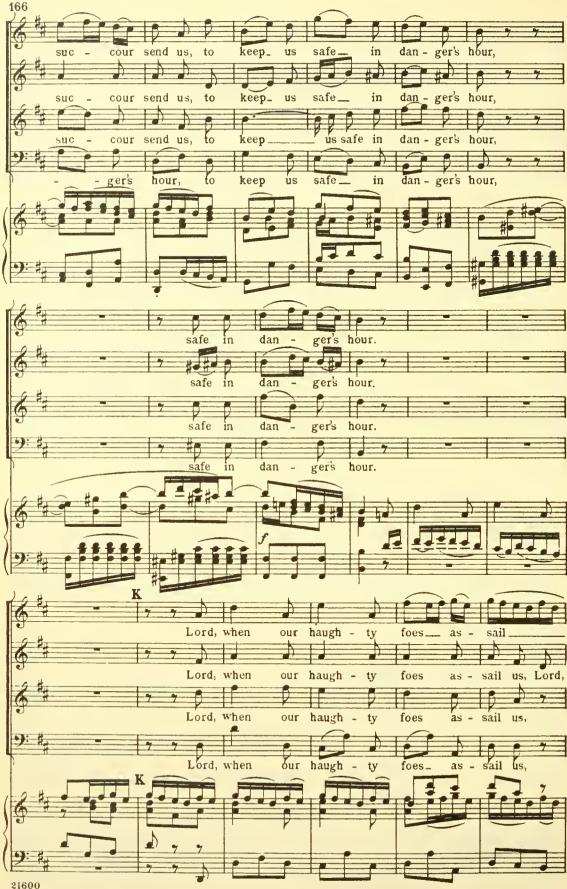


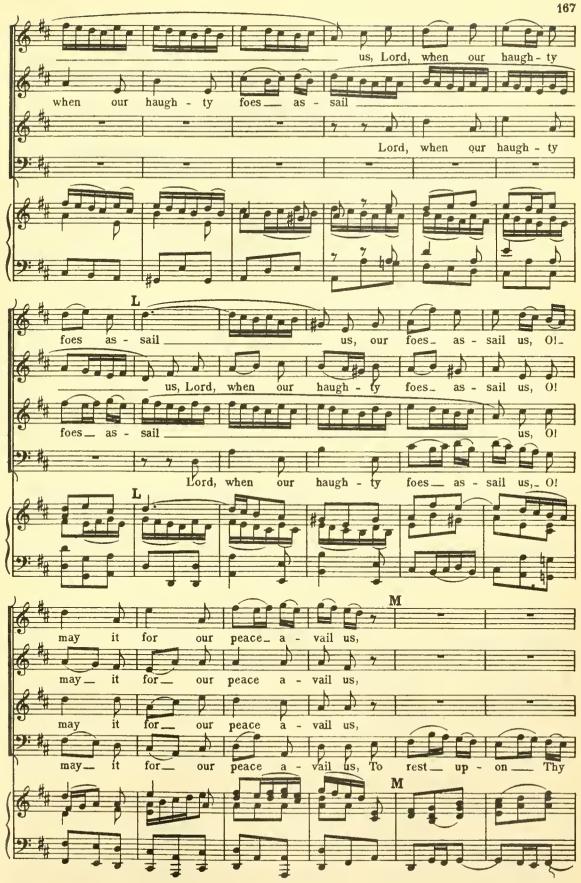








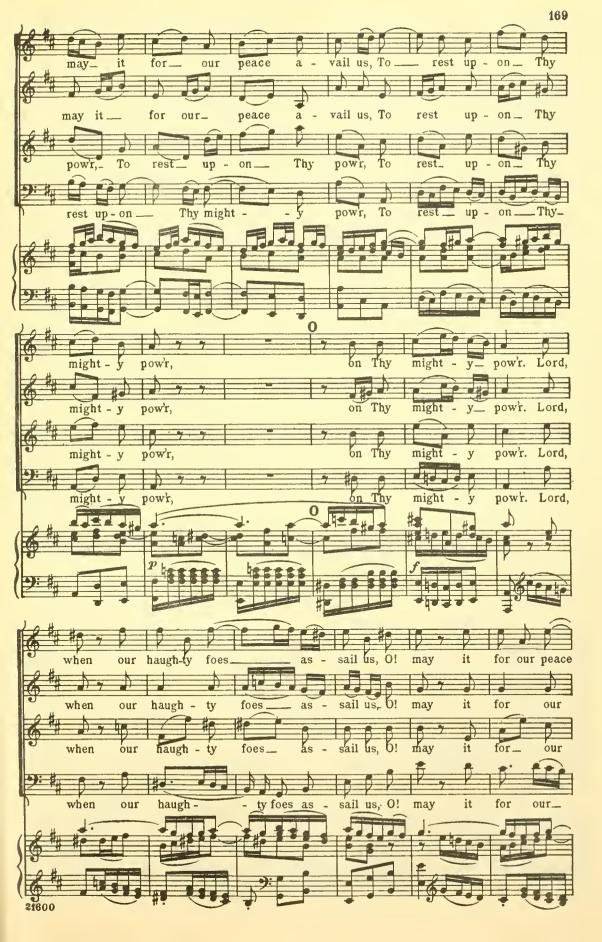


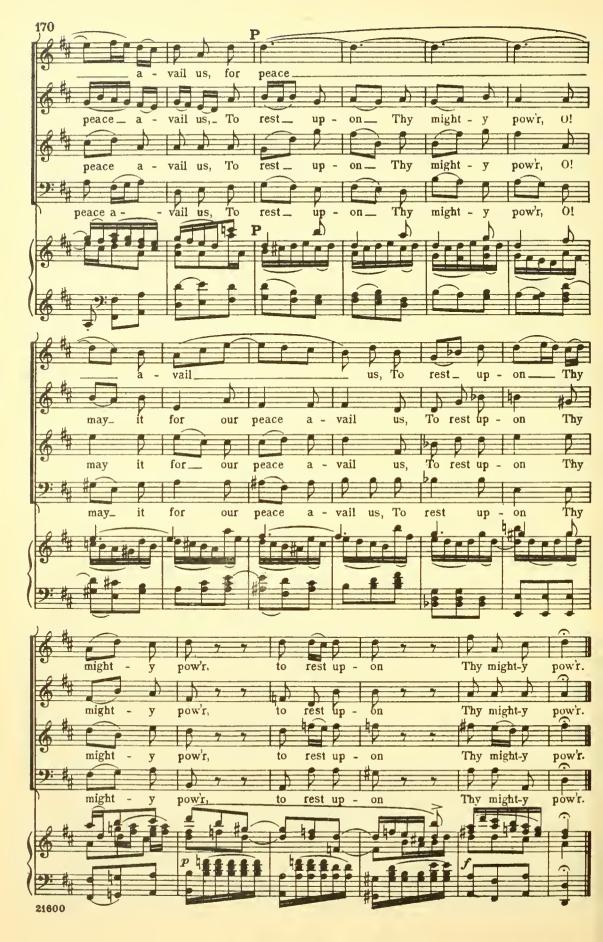




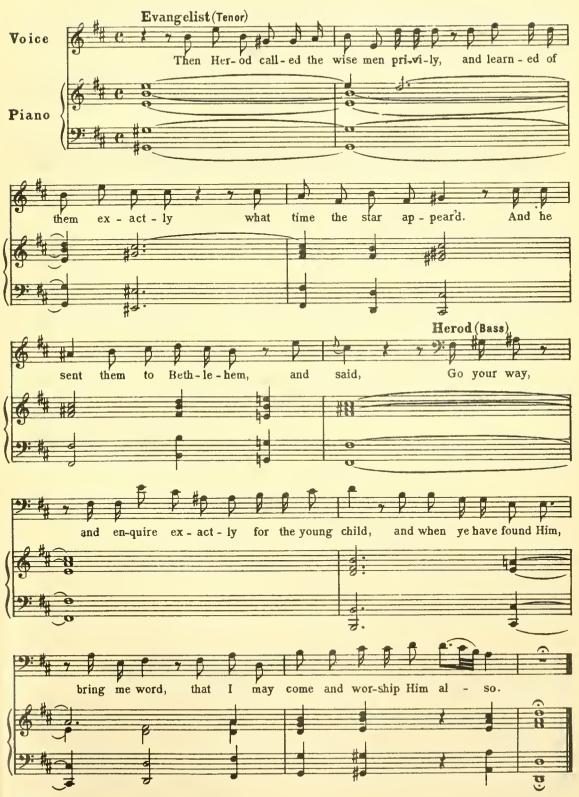








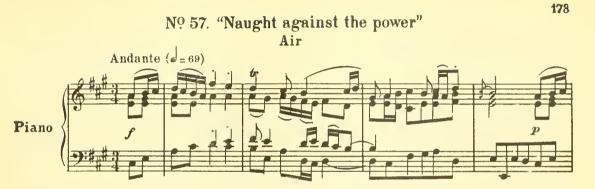
Nº 55. "Then Herod called the Wise Men" Recitative



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Nº 56."Thou traitor" Recitative

























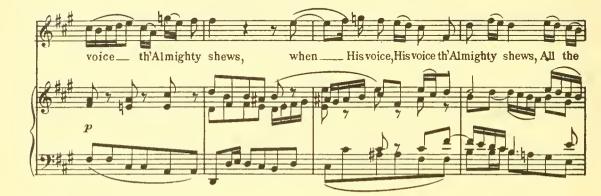


















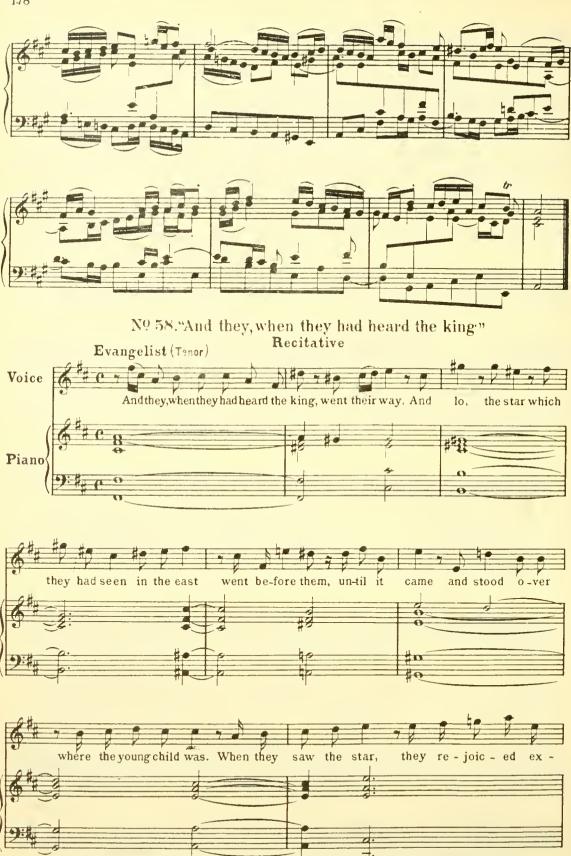


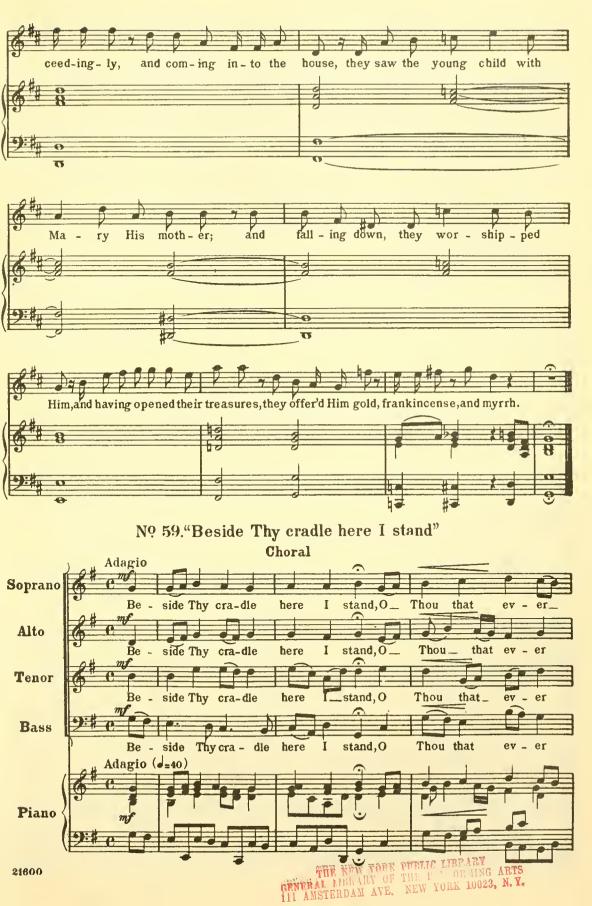


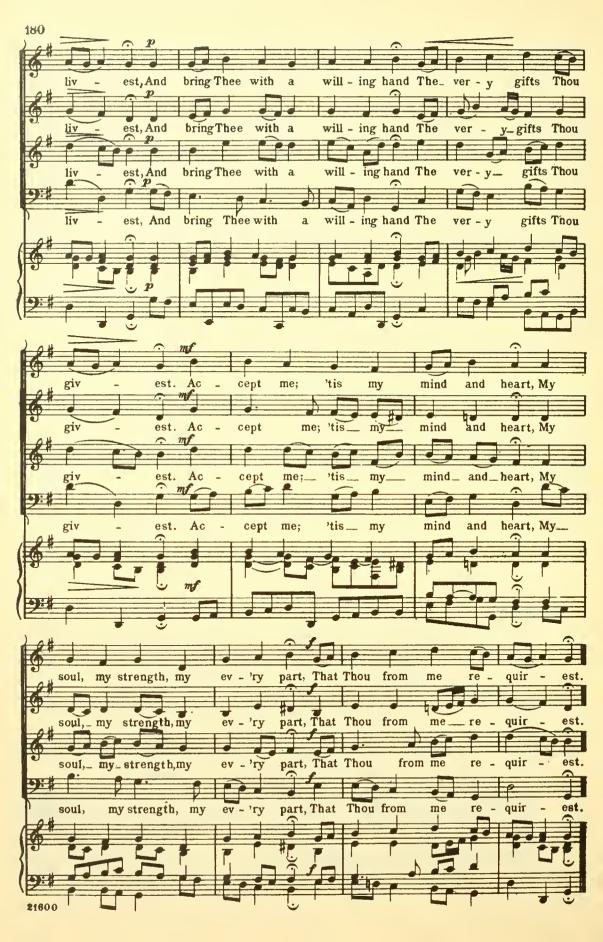


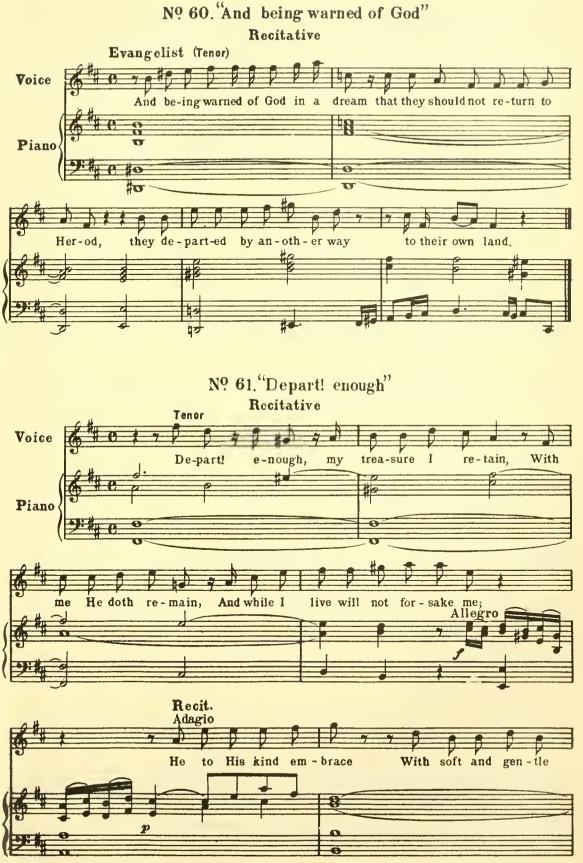


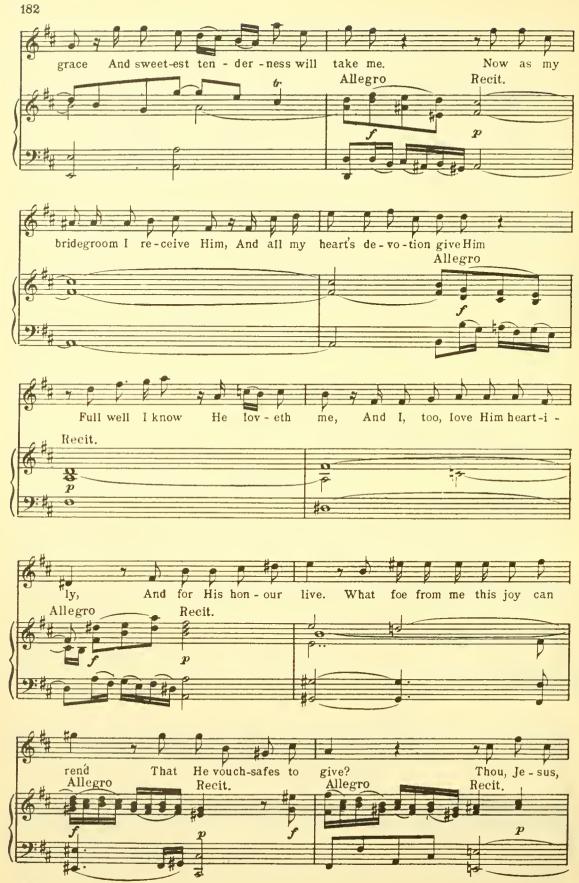


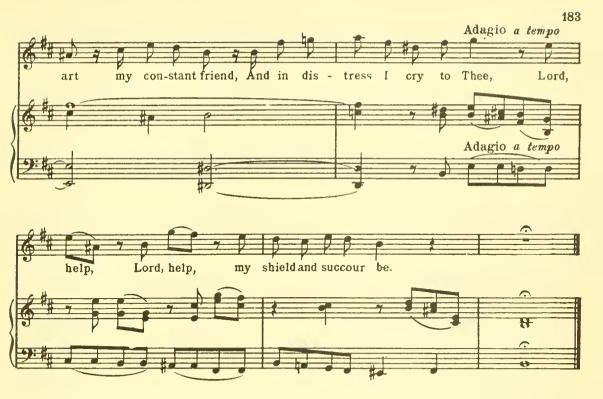










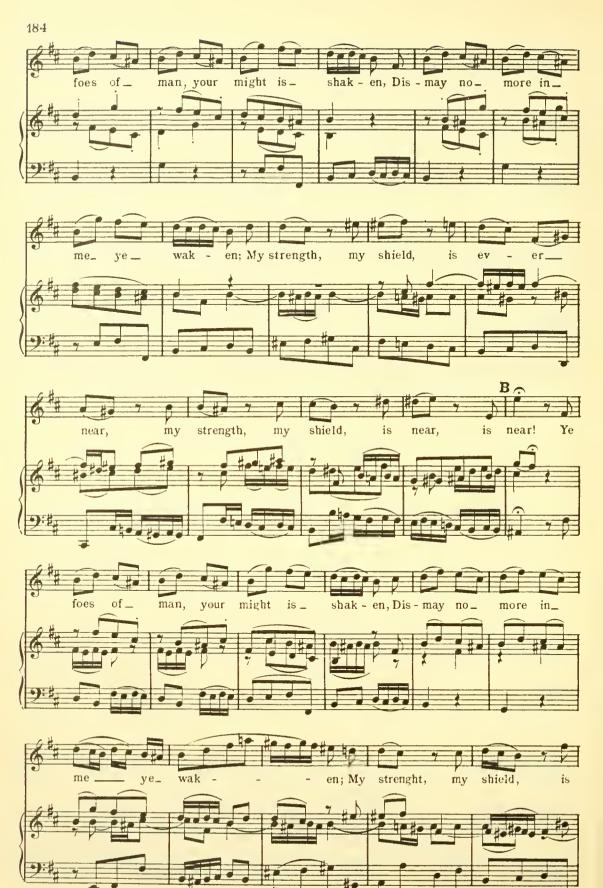


Nº 62. "Ye foes of man" Alr









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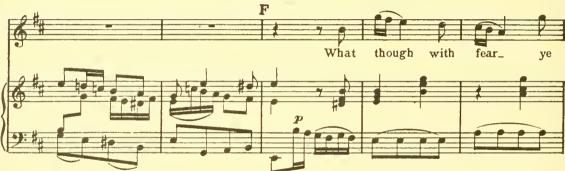


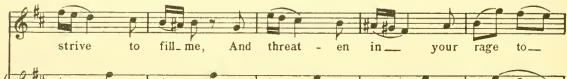
































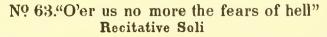


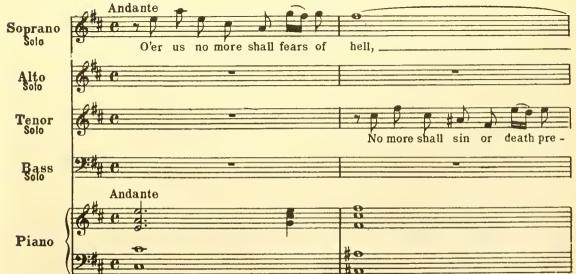


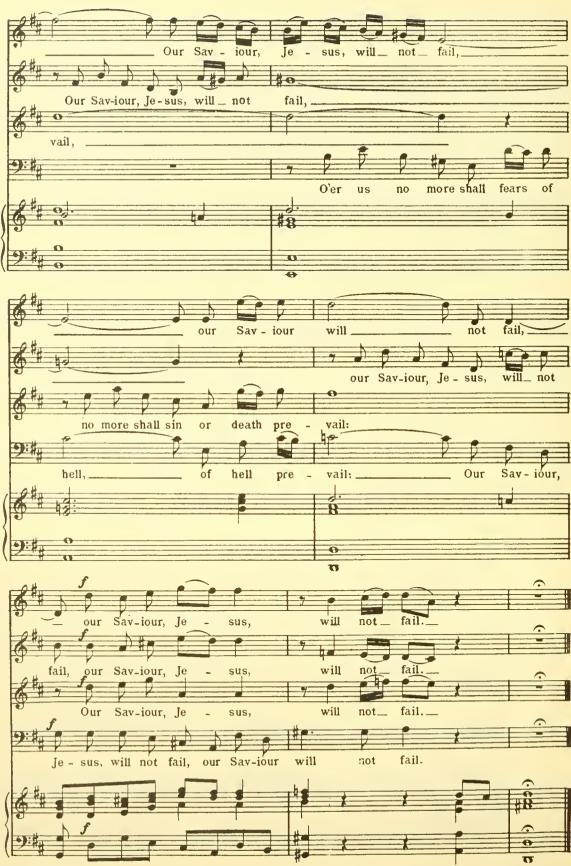




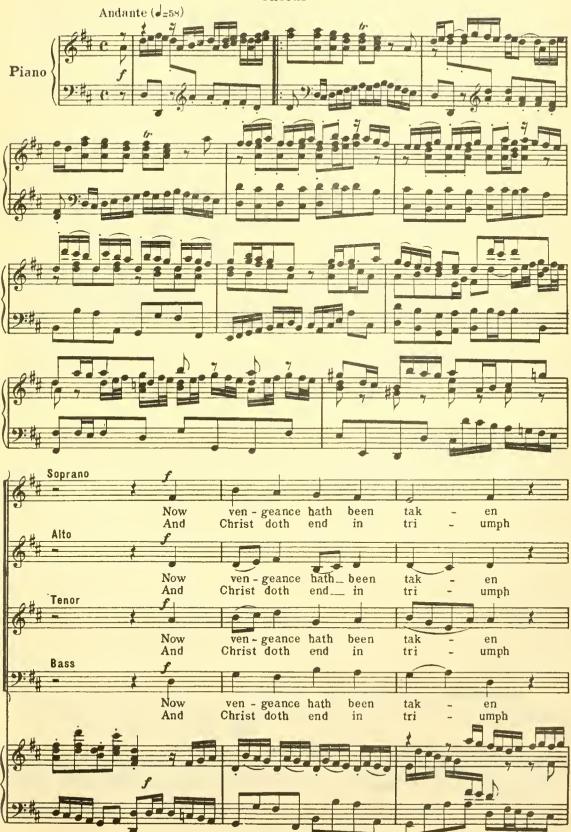


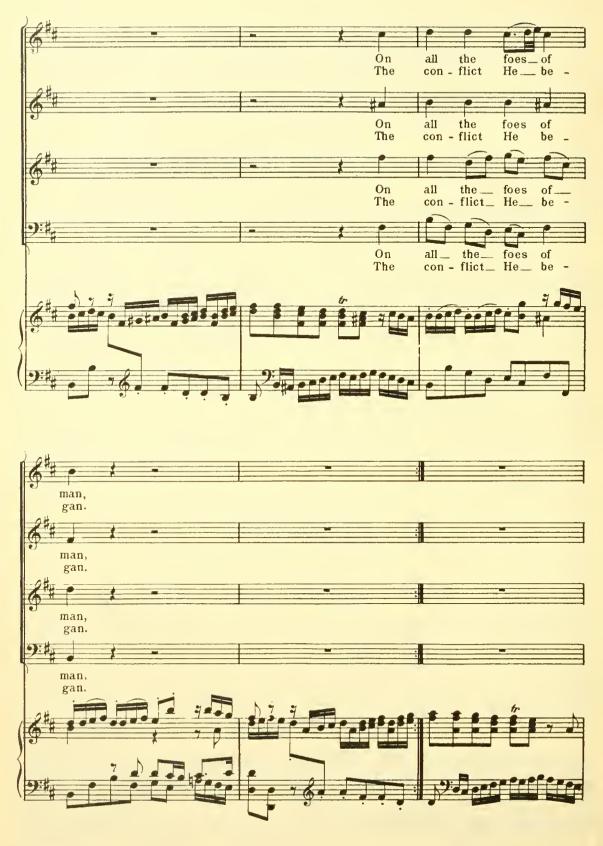


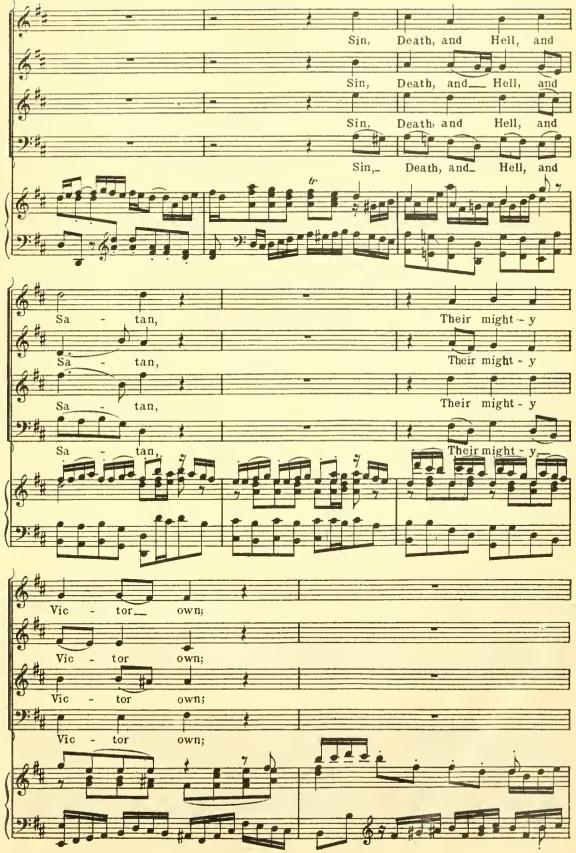


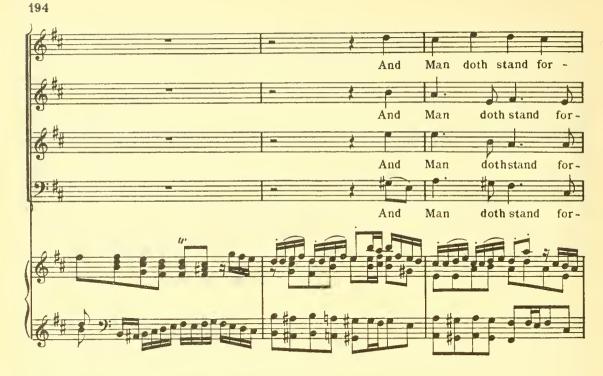


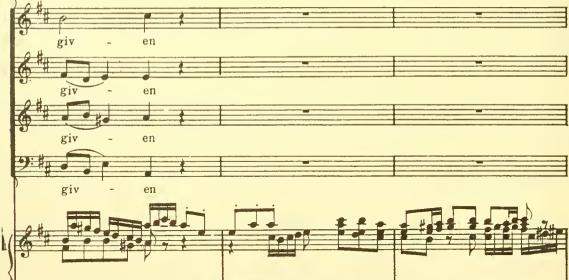
Nº 64."Now vengeance hath been taken" Choral

























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